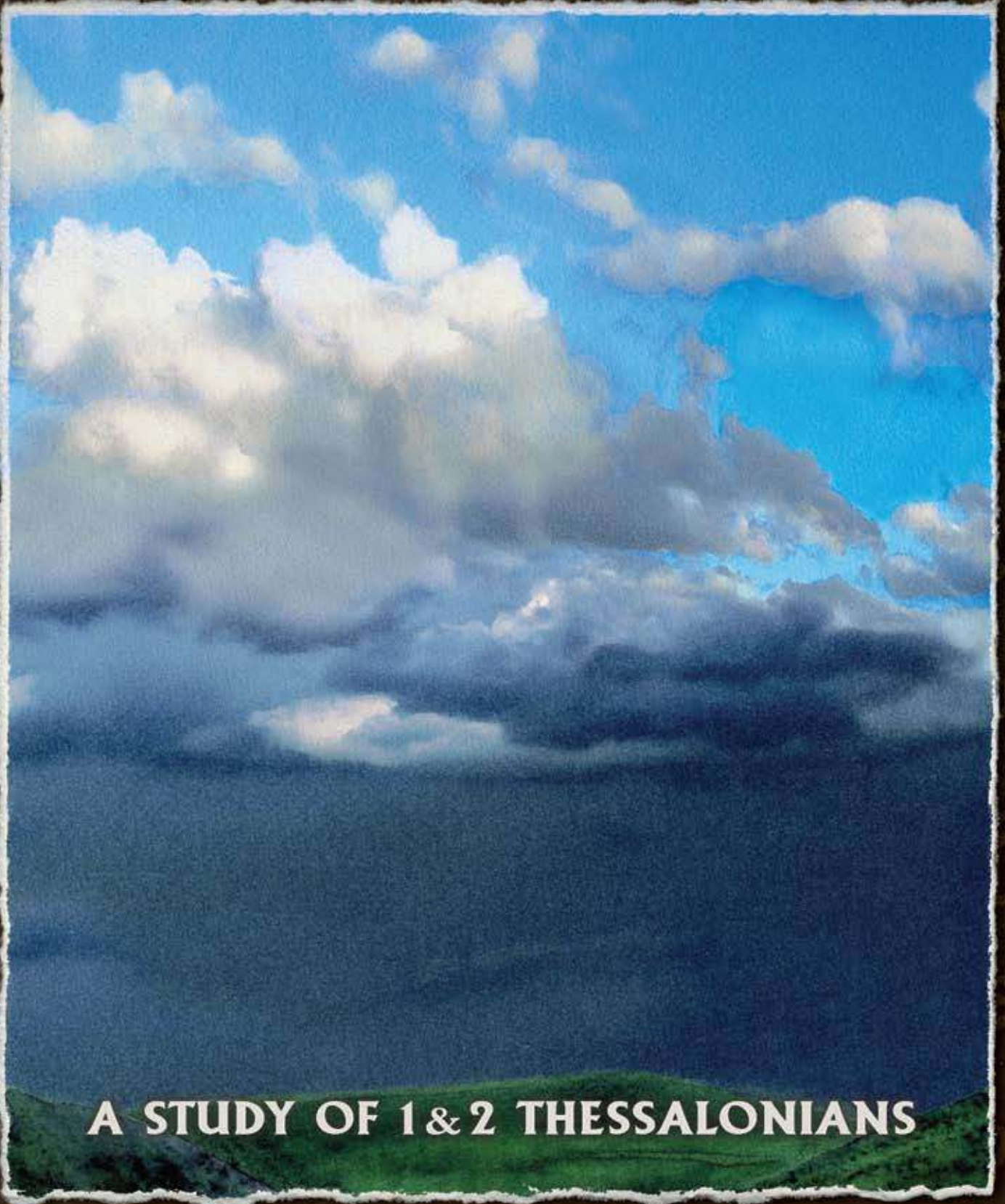


# Darkness and Light



**A STUDY OF 1 & 2 THESSALONIANS**

WRITTEN BY TOM KELBY

# ***Darkness and Light***

**A STUDY OF 1 AND 2 THESSALONIANS**

*Written by Tom Kelby*

*Illustration and Design by Mark Yaeger*

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# **HANDS to the PLOW**

## **MINISTRIES**

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*To the elders of Cornerstone.*

*Herb, Don, Trygve, Fred, and Jeff—It is a joy and privilege to serve with you. May your love for Christ grow even deeper in the days ahead. May your joy in his salvation flow even more freely. May your vision grow even clearer. I love, admire, and appreciate each one of you. - TK*

*To Mike and Brian. I am extremely blessed to be given a job that I love and to be teamed up with two awesome men of God in the process. I wouldn't want it any other way. - MY*



## ABOUT THE COVER

I think back to my childhood when I would play baseball in our neighborhood with all my friends. There was a time when we would play all day long, every day possible—especially in the summer months. There was nothing better than the competitive sandlot baseball games during those long, hot days. I also remember, on the rare occasions, when our games were cut short by the sudden rain storm that would roll in. And, every once in awhile we would encounter the type of storms that would send us all scrambling for our very lives. You know the kind—the big, rolling black clouds surrounded by a green sky and the lightning would flash towards the ground as though it had a mind of its own, looking to strike out at any young boy who was daring enough to face this monster head on. Of course that wasn't any of us. We were high-tailing it to safety. If we timed it just right we would side-saddle our bikes right into the garage, throw our gloves on the nearest shelf and dive into the basement door just before the wall of rain pasted the house. That was always an exciting adventure.

When Tom provided the concept for the cover of the 1 and 2 Thessalonians Bible study it naturally stirred up those old memories. It was Tom's desire to create an image that would represent what is written in 1 Thessalonians chapters 4 and 5 concerning the "The day of the Lord"—

*For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18*

*Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. 1 Thessalonians 5:1-5*

There it is—approaching us, "The day of the Lord", just like a summer thunder storm only with eternal ramifications. You can't predict its arrival, but you know eventually it will happen. If you are a follower of Jesus Christ you have nothing to fear—as ominous as the storm looks you will be whisked away from the destruction. Pretty exciting from the perspective of those who are "children of the day", but whoa to those who are in "darkness", who have no refuge. Can you imagine the fear in a young boy's mind if he raced home ahead of the storm only to find the door locked and no place to escape the oncoming calamity?

I personally am forever grateful to be a "child of light". Go team!

**MARK**

Mark Yaeger

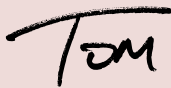
## INTRODUCTION

These two letters probably shouldn't have been written. Much of the information in them was given because Paul was kicked out of Thessalonica prematurely, and, thus, was not able to tell the church these things in person.

Here, we find (in addition to Paul's apology regarding his prolonged absence from the city) instructions about how the believer can live in a way that is pleasing to God. These instructions apply to all believers—but they often go undone. We also find, in detail seen nowhere else, explanations regarding the coming of the Lord.

The Thessalonian letters leave the reader with great longing for the coming of Jesus. They also leave the reader with a good idea of those things that ought to be done until his coming. In other words, these letters apply to today. They also apply to That Day.

May God bless you as you study and apply the truths found in these two letters.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom". The letters are stylized and cursive.

Tom Kelby  
November 25, 2009

## HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

There are four parts to this eight-week study: Scripture reading, study questions to answer, study notes to read, and a weekly journal to record insights the Holy Spirit has taught you. All four are important. You will not get nearly as much out of this study if you skip any of the four. Also, do the lessons in order. Paul builds on his arguments in each verse. We need to follow the process he follows, for we will miss basic truths that are foundational to our understanding if we jump ahead.

Here's how I would recommend using this book:

On day one of each week, read the appropriate verses in 1 or 2 Thessalonians we have printed in the book. We have printed the actual verses in this study book for three main reasons. First, we believe you will be able to more freely write notes and questions in the margins, which is something you may not be comfortable doing in your "everyday" Bible. Second, most Bibles break down the verses for the reader, even titling the different sections. We have printed the verses without these breaks as it is important that you dissect the passage for yourself. Finally, many Bibles include study notes. These are helpful, but they can keep you from "wrestling" with the passage yourself.

Read the passage slowly. Once you have read through the passage, read it through a second time. God has a great deal he would like to show you in his word. As you read, ask the Lord for wisdom. Why is this passage significant? What is the truth Paul is trying to get across in this passage? How do the thoughts in this passage relate to those in the verses before it? We have printed the passages with enough spacing so that you have the room necessary to write your thoughts and questions regarding the passage, however, do no writing your first time through the passage. Simply read the passage slowly. Your second read-through of the passage should be different. This time, pay close attention to the themes Paul is developing. Circle repeated words or phrases. Underline major themes. Break the passage down into smaller sections and title these sections. Write down other verses that relate to truths Paul is teaching in this passage. Avoid the use of a Bible commentary or the notes in a study Bible at this point. Do the work yourself. The Lord will give you wisdom.

On days two through five, answer the study questions. The questions will often bring you to other passages that will further illuminate the verses you are studying.

On day six, read the study notes. These notes will give you my perspective on the passage. Oftentimes in the notes you will find verses referred to, but not printed. These verses are important. Please take the time to look these verses up. It will help you in your overall understanding of Scripture.

Finally, after you've read the notes, write down any truths the Holy Spirit has taught you over the previous week.

# *Week One*

## INTRODUCTION



## WEEK ONE

### *Introduction*

#### DAY ONE

1. Paul's initial visit to Thessalonica is detailed in Acts 17:1-9. Outline the events that took place during this visit.

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2. Thessalonica was a large city located in a province called Macedonia. Where is Macedonia located? (Use the maps tracing Paul's missionary journeys located in the back of your Bible)

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3. Why did Paul and his companions travel to Macedonia? Acts 16:6-10

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4. Why do you think Paul was called to Macedonia in this particular way? What might this say about God's plans for Paul versus Paul's plans for Paul?

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5. How should your answer to question four impact the way you live your life?

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## DAY TWO

6. Describe Paul's hasty departure from Thessalonica. *Acts 17:5-10*

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7. What potential problems might arise in a church that would lose its leader so early in its existence?

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8. Do you see any benefits to a church losing its leader so early in its existence? If so, what are they?

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## DAY THREE

9. Paul eventually returned to Thessalonica during his third missionary journey. Why did he wait so long to return to this young church? *1 Thessalonians 2:17-18*

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10. What does this tell you about the work of Satan?

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11. What does this tell you about the work of God? Why would he allow this to happen? What benefit, if any, would this bring to the church?

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## WEEK ONE

### *Introduction*

## WEEK ONE

### *Introduction*

12. Do you think Satan is doing the same thing today? Why is God, if he is in control, allowing this to happen?

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13. What did Paul do to strengthen the church during the long period when he wasn't able to return to the church himself? *1 Thessalonians 3:1-5*

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14. 1 and 2 Thessalonians were written during the period when Paul was not able to visit the church. What sorts of topics might you expect Paul to address in letters written under these circumstances?

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15. Two Thessalonian Christians—Aristarchus and Secundus—accompanied Paul on his third missionary journey (see Acts 20:1-6). Aristarchus also accompanied Paul on his voyage to Rome (see Acts 27:2). He eventually was imprisoned with him (see Colossians 4:10). What does this tell you about the church in Thessalonica and Paul's relationship with the church?

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## DAY FOUR

16. Read 1 Thessalonians, preferably in one sitting. Don't take any notes as you read, just take the time to slowly read the chapters. When you are finished, write any thoughts these chapters leave you with in the space below.

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## DAY FIVE

17. Read 2 Thessalonians, preferably in one sitting. Don't take any notes as you read, just take the time to slowly read the chapters. When you are finished, write any thoughts these chapters leave you with in the space below.

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## DAY SIX

18. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week, the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

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## WEEK ONE

### *Introduction*

## WEEK ONE

### Introduction

## INTRODUCTION

The first letter to the Thessalonians is, in some ways, a five chapter sigh of relief. It was written after Paul learned that the church in Thessalonica had not, as he feared, died from neglect.

The church planting process in Thessalonica had been greatly short-circuited. Nothing, it seems, had gone according to plan. Yet, against all odds, the church was still in existence. More than that, it was thriving. With this news ringing in his ears, Paul began his letter.

*Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,  
To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:  
Grace to you and peace. 1 Thessalonians 1:1*

The church in Thessalonica was established during Paul's second missionary journey. After Paul, Silas, and Timothy completed their eventful and productive church-planting work in Philippi,<sup>1</sup> they headed south on the road called the Egnatian Way toward Thessalonica, the capital city of Macedonia.<sup>2</sup> The journey would have taken several days, as Thessalonica was located 94 miles southwest of Philippi.

As a city, Thessalonica had much to offer. Not only did it sit on a major trade route, it also boasted "the best Aegean port along the Via Egnatia".<sup>3</sup>

Thessalonica was situated on the edge of the great central plain of Macedonia, which boasted fertile soil and abundant rain and rivers. The climate was continental and not Mediterranean, with hot summers and cold winters suitable for growing grain and continental fruits but not crops such as olives and dates. Grazing land was abundant, and fish filled the nearby rivers, lakes, and the Thermaic Gulf. The mountains around the city were forested, providing an abundant source of timber for the construction of houses and boats. The surrounding region was also rich with mines of gold, silver, copper, iron, and lead.<sup>4</sup>

## THE GOSPEL COMES TO THESSALONICA

As was their custom, Paul and Silas began their work in Thessalonica in a Jewish synagogue. Luke's account indicates that Paul ministered in the synagogue for three weeks. However, this should not be taken to mean that Paul and his companions stayed in Thessalonica for only three weeks. Based on Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians,<sup>5</sup> it seems likely that Paul stayed in Thessalonica for a longer period of time. And Paul's letter to the Philippian church indicates that they sent him "help for [his] needs once and again" while he was in Thessalonica (Philippians 4:16). This, too, would seem to indicate a longer stay in Thessalonica than just three weeks.

Paul's preaching ministry in Thessalonica was, by Paul's own admission, extremely difficult.

*... as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God  
in the midst of much conflict. 1 Thessalonians 2:2*

During his three weeks of preaching in the synagogue Paul "reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ'" (Acts 17:2-3). Commentator John Stott outlines how Paul may have approached his preaching on these three Sabbath days in the synagogue.

First, he argued from the Old Testament Scriptures that the expected Christ (*i.e.* the Messiah) had to suffer and rise from the dead. Next, he proclaimed Jesus of Nazareth to them, doubtless telling the story of his life, death and resurrection. And thirdly, he put his first and second points together, and declared that this Jesus was that Christ. In other words, Old Testament prophecy had been fulfilled in Jesus, so that the Jesus of history and the Christ of Scripture were the same person.<sup>6</sup>

1 Recorded in Acts 16:11-40. While Paul's stay in Philippi warranted 29 verses of coverage in Acts, Paul's ministry in Thessalonica is described in just nine verses. This may be due, in part, to the fact that Luke, the author of the book of Acts, was with Paul in Philippi but did not travel with him to Thessalonica.

2 Modern Thessaloniki is the capital of Macedonia and ranks second in population size among Grecian cities.

3 Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (PNTC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), 6.

4 Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 6.

5 For instance, in 1 Thessalonians 2:9-12, Paul says, "For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory".

6 John Stott, *The Gospel and the End of Time: The Message of 1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1991), 18.

I would love to have been in attendance those three days to hear how Paul worked through the Old Testament Scriptures. This topic should have created great excitement in the heart of any lover of God. It should have inspired the Jews in attendance to examine the Scriptures to see if Paul's assertions regarding the Christ were true. However, the response among Paul's Jewish listeners was tepid, at best. Apparently, the Jews in Thessalonica did not receive the word of God with eagerness, and they did not examine the Scriptures to see if the claims Paul was making were true.<sup>7</sup>

Paul's ministry reached a climax on the third day of preaching in the synagogue.<sup>8</sup> Luke indicates that "some of [the Jews] were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas" (Acts 17:4). However, the response among the Gentiles was far greater. Luke indicates that "a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women" became followers of Jesus.

This was the beginning of the church in Thessalonica. It was also the beginning of Paul's troubles in the city.

*But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.*  
Acts 17:5-9

## PAUL AND HIS COMPANIONS FLEE THESSALONICA

Paul, Silas, and Timothy were forced to flee from Thessalonica. It should be noted that Paul would have liked to stay in Thessalonica longer. He writes that he was "torn away" from the fledgling church (1 Thessalonians 2:17). Unfortunately, Paul was torn away before those in the church were firmly established in their faith.<sup>9</sup>

After their hasty departure from Thessalonica, Paul and his companions traveled west on the Via Egnatia to Berea. Once again, Paul started in the synagogue. The ministry in Berea was, at least in the beginning, remarkably successful.

*Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men.* Acts 17:11-12

However, Paul's ministry in Berea was cut short by the Jews from Thessalonica. He had been sent away from Thessalonica by night, thus they did not know where he had gone. Soon, however, they heard that Paul was preaching in Berea.

*But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds. Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there.* Acts 17:13-14

The Jews had, by their hatred of Paul and of the gospel message, driven Paul from Thessalonica and even from the region of Macedonia. Unfortunately, Paul was not able to return to Thessalonica for quite some time. He urgently desired to return to the church. This wasn't just because he missed them. He feared "that somehow the tempter had tempted [them] and [their] labor would be in vain" (1 Thessalonians 3:5). But Paul was not able to return to the church. He was "hindered" by Satan.

<sup>7</sup> See Acts 17:11.

<sup>8</sup> Paul's ministry in the synagogues seldom continued peacefully for extended periods of time. In Antioch of Pisidia, for instance, Paul preached for two days before the Jews "were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul" (Acts 13:45). While he may have stayed in the synagogue in Corinth for a longer period of time (see Acts 18:4), in the end, the results were the same.

<sup>9</sup> See 1 Thessalonians 3:2.



## WEEK ONE

### Introduction

*But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us. 1 Thessalonians 2:17-18*

The exact manner in which Satan hindered Paul is not known. It might have been connected to the hatred directed toward Paul by the Jews in Thessalonica.<sup>10</sup> Whatever the exact identity of the satanic hindrance was, it was sufficient to keep Paul from returning to Thessalonica. But while Satan was able to keep Paul from returning to Thessalonica, he was not able to keep Paul from influencing the church there. Satan's hindrance prompted Paul to do what he often did when he couldn't travel to a certain place; he sent a coworker instead.

*Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, that no one be moved by these afflictions. 1 Thessalonians 3:1-3a*

Apparently, Timothy was able to travel to Thessalonica without the satanic hindrance which Paul had experienced. If the hindrance was related to the Jews in Thessalonica, perhaps the Jews in Thessalonica did not pay any attention to Paul's young helper. He certainly didn't advertise his presence in the city by attempting to preach and teach in the synagogue. His efforts would have been focused on the church that had been established in the recent months. While there, Timothy worked hard to "establish and exhort [the Thessalonian church] in [their] faith".

It appears his efforts were a rousing success. The church was thriving. But Paul didn't know that it was thriving. While Timothy was strengthening the church in Thessalonica, Paul was alone in Athens,<sup>11</sup> anxiously waiting for news from Timothy.

*For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain. 1 Thessalonians 3:5*

By the time Timothy and Silas returned from Macedonia (Timothy from Thessalonica and Silas from possibly Philippi or Berea),<sup>12</sup> Paul had moved from Athens to Corinth. Timothy returned to Paul with great news.

*But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you—for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith. 1 Thessalonians 3:6-7*

It is likely that Silas also had good news regarding the Thessalonian church. This is not because he had been in Thessalonica. Rather, he had been ministering elsewhere in Macedonia (possibly Philippi and/or Berea). Silas's encounters with the believers in those cities may be the source of the following comment in 1 Thessalonians.

*... you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere ... 1 Thessalonians 1:7-8*

<sup>10</sup> Some scholars suggest that the satanic hindrance might have had some connection to the bond the believers in Thessalonica needed to post after the uproar in the city (see Acts 17:8-9).

<sup>11</sup> Paul had sent Silas to Macedonia at this same time (see Acts 18:5). Where Silas visited is not known. It is likely he visited the church in Philippi or Berea.

<sup>12</sup> See Acts 18:1-5.

## PAUL'S LETTERS TO THE THESSALONIANS

Timothy's return prompted Paul to write his first letter to the Thessalonians. Paul sent the letter somewhere between A.D. 49-51. It was probably Paul's second letter.<sup>13</sup> In the letter, Paul proclaims his love for the church—a love they perhaps questioned due to his prolonged absence, expresses his joy at the discovery that they were faithfully serving the Lord, reminds the saints of truths they had learned from him earlier, and teaches and encourages the saints regarding the coming of the Lord Jesus.

However, Paul's relationship with the church extended well beyond this first letter. He also sent a second letter to the church.<sup>14</sup> And, much to his delight, he was able, during his third missionary journey, to finally return to Thessalonica.<sup>15</sup> This third missionary journey is most famous for Paul's extended stay in Ephesus. However, upon leaving Ephesus, Paul traveled to Macedonia. The book of Acts does not indicate that Paul traveled to Thessalonica at this time. However, as Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia and sat upon the major road traveling through Macedonia, it is inconceivable that Paul traveled through Macedonia without spending some time in Thessalonica.

Paul traveled through Macedonia and, as on his second missionary journey, eventually ended up in Greece. He planned to sail from Greece to Syria (thus not returning through Thessalonica), however, the Jews were plotting against him, and this caused him to change his travel plans and to travel through Macedonia (and, thus, Thessalonica) one more time. Luke's account of Paul's ministry in Thessalonica is, as was his account of Paul's initial visit to Thessalonica, greatly compressed.

*... Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia. When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece. There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. Acts 20:1-3*

It may appear, based on this brief history, that the relationship between Paul and the church in Thessalonica was fairly one-sided—they were constantly receiving from him. This is hardly the case. The church gave its very best to Paul: its people. Two Thessalonian believers, Aristarchus and Secundus, accompanied Paul on his third missionary journey.<sup>16</sup> Aristarchus went on to become a key member of Paul's team. He even sailed with Paul to Rome and was with him when he wrote his prison epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon).<sup>17</sup> He also became, although it is not clear how, Paul's fellow prisoner.<sup>18</sup>

The birth of any church is a miracle. The survival of any church, as may be seen by the history of the church in Thessalonica, is also a miracle. That God worked in this less-than-ideal way to establish the church in this city is a wonder. Of course, we wouldn't have these letters written in the way they are written if the church wasn't established in this way. May we learn much from these great letters, and may they be used to increase our love for our Lord and for his church in the days ahead.

## WEEK ONE

### Introduction

13 Galatians was probably Paul's first letter.

14 Interestingly, some scholars argue that 2 Thessalonians was written before 1 Thessalonians.

15 Look at the maps in the back of your Bible to trace the route of Paul's third missionary journey.

16 See Acts 20:4-6. Aristarchus was with Paul in Ephesus. See Acts 19:29.

17 See Acts 27:2 and Philemon 24.

18 See Colossians 4:10.

# *Week Two*

## **1 THESSALONIANS 1**

## DAY ONE

Read 1 Thessalonians 1 through twice. The first time through the chapter, simply read the text. Do not write any notes regarding the chapter at this time. The second time through the chapter, circle or underline key words or phrases and write down any questions or thoughts the chapter leaves you with in the margin. If the verses bring any related Scriptures to mind, please write them in the margin.

### 1 THESSALONIANS 1

<sup>1</sup> Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

*To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:*

*Grace to you and peace.*

<sup>2</sup> *We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers,*

<sup>3</sup> *remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and*

*steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.* <sup>4</sup> *For we know, brothers loved by God, that*

*he has chosen you,* <sup>5</sup> *because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power*

*and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved*

*to be among you for your sake.* <sup>6</sup> *And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you*

*received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit,* <sup>7</sup> *so that you became*

*an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.* <sup>8</sup> *For not only has the word*

*of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has*

*gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.* <sup>9</sup> *For they themselves report*

*concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from*

*idols to serve the living and true God,* <sup>10</sup> *and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he*

*raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*

## DAY TWO

1. In 1 Thessalonians 1:1 Paul does not mention that he is an apostle. In which of his letters (the letters in the New Testament from Romans through Philemon) do you find him including this fact?

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2. Why do you think he might leave this important detail out of this letter? In other words, what might his omission of this fact say about his relationship with those to whom he was sending the letter?

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3. What do verses 2 and 3 tell you about how Paul and his companions spent their time together? What do they tell you about the importance of prayer in Paul's life?

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## WEEK TWO

### 1 THESSALONIANS 1

## WEEK TWO

### 1 THESSALONIANS 1

4. If someone were to write about the importance of prayer in your life, what would they, based on your life, be able to write?

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5. In verse 3, Paul indicates that he and his companions brought up three specific things when they prayed to God regarding the church of the Thessalonians. What were those three things?

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2.

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3.

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6. What do you think each of these three things mean? (Use the study notes in your Bible or another translation to provide additional help.)

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2.

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3.

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### DAY THREE

7. In verse 4, Paul makes two statements about God's relationship with the Thessalonian church. What are they?

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2.

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8. If you are a Christian, do you know these things to be true about yourself?

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9. Read verse 4 and the first half of verse 5 carefully. How did Paul and his companions know that God had chosen the Thessalonians (to become followers of Jesus)?

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10. When did God choose the Thessalonian believers? *Ephesians 1:4*

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11. Why did he choose them? *Ephesians 1:4, Romans 8:28-30*

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12. What do verses like these tell you about God's role in salvation?

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13. In Acts 13:48, Luke (the author of Acts) describes the circumstances surrounding the Gentiles in Antioch in Pisidia becoming followers of Jesus. Which Gentiles, according to Luke, became followers of Jesus?

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14. How would a lack of understanding regarding this important truth change one's understanding of how a person becomes a follower of Jesus?

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## DAY FOUR

15. What did the believers in Thessalonica do after they accepted the gospel? *1 Thessalonians 1:6-7*

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## WEEK TWO

### 1 THESSALONIANS 1



## WEEK TWO

### 1 THESSALONIANS 1

16. Notice the strange combination of the words “affliction” and “joy” in verse 6. How, based on this verse, could the Christians in Thessalonica have experienced joy in the midst of this great affliction?

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17. Has this been your experience? Please explain your answer.

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18. What promises do you find in the New Testament regarding afflictions?

*1 Thessalonians 3:1-3*

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*2 Timothy 3:12*

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*John 15:18-21*

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*John 16:33*

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19. What promises do you find in the New Testament regarding joy?

*John 15:11*

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*John 16:20-24*

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20. How did the believers in Thessalonica become an example to the believers in Macedonia and Achaia? *1 Thessalonians 1:7-10*

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## DAY FIVE

21. In verse 10, Paul refers to Jesus as the one “who delivers us from the wrath to come”. Paul is referring to God’s wrath that will be poured out at the end of the age. How is this wrath described in Romans 2:1-11?

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22. Why is God justified in pouring out his wrath on mankind? *Romans 3:10-20*

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23. How does Jesus deliver the Christian from the wrath to come? *Romans 3:21-26*

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24. What confidence can the Christian have that he or she will be delivered from God’s wrath?

*1 Thessalonians 1:10, Romans 8:1-4*

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## DAY SIX

25. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week, the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

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## WEEK TWO

### 1 THESSALONIANS 1

## WEEK TWO

### 1 THESSALONIANS 1

How do you begin a letter such as this—a letter to a church from which you’ve been “torn away” (1 Thessalonians 2:17)—a letter to a church that, perhaps, felt that they had been neglected by you to some extent—a letter to a church that was, against all earthly odds, surviving in the midst of great suffering?

You begin by affirming your love for the church. Paul writes, if it can be described in this way, gently here. This is evidenced by the fact that he does not, unlike his usual custom, mention the fact that he is an apostle in the introduction to this letter.<sup>1</sup>

*Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,  
To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:  
Grace to you and peace. 1 Thessalonians 1:1*

This may be because this letter did not demand the sort of weight the apostolic label would have put on the letter. It was not written to refute false teaching or false teachers in the church (i.e., Galatians and Colossians), it was not written to a church that the author had never visited (i.e., Romans), it was not written to confront immorality within the church (i.e., 1 Corinthians), and it was not written so that it might be circulated among many churches (i.e., Ephesians). Rather, this letter was written to affirm Paul’s love for the church in this one city, to explain why the church had been seemingly neglected, and to comfort, strengthen, and guide the church with much-needed teaching. There simply was no need, it appears, for Paul to remind the church of his apostolic calling.

This letter also differs from the majority of Paul’s other letters in that it doesn’t read as if it is solely from Paul. The letter reads as if Silas<sup>2</sup> and Timothy (the other names mentioned in the introduction) actually played a vital role in its composition. Granted, other letters also begin with a list of names alongside of Paul’s.<sup>3</sup> But the letters to the Thessalonians appear to be different.<sup>4</sup> Notice the prevalence of the pronoun “we” in this letter and the relatively few occurrences of the word “I”. This does not mean that the letter was co-authored by Paul, Silas, and Timothy. It was clearly authored by Paul.<sup>5</sup> Rather, it seems to indicate that the words written by Paul here were truly shared—in a real and deep sense—by his entire team. While the words are his alone, he was not writing alone.

### THE APOSTOLIC TEAM’S PRAYERS

Paul’s words give us a picture of what life must have been like for those who traveled with the apostle. Much of their time was spent in prayer.

*We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers ... 1 Thessalonians 1:2*

The manner in which Paul, Timothy, and Silas prayed for the church in Thessalonica is quite instructive for us. First, while perhaps obvious, it should be noted that the prayers these three men (and perhaps others with them) offered weren’t focused solely on their own needs. They spent a great deal of time praying for the church. Their prayers were not all about the church in Thessalonica, of course, for there were other churches about which they were concerned.<sup>6</sup> However, Paul and his companions prayed frequently and specifically for the church in Thessalonica.

Before considering the manner in which they prayed and the content of those prayers, it is worth asking ourselves if we could write a letter to a church with which we have been involved and tell them that we give thanks “always” for them and that we are “constantly” remembering them in our prayers.

Prayer is vital to the advancement of the work of God. It is vital because it is the means by which his work is accomplished on earth. In other words, God has decreed that events will happen because we pray for them. If we do not pray, these events will not take place. For this reason, we must pray. Prayer is also important because it is the way in which we communicate with God. How can we say that we have a relationship with God if we never talk with him?

1 Paul indicates that he is an apostle in Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus. He does not indicate that he is an apostle in Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon.

2 Silas is referred to as Silvanus in the introduction.

3 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon all include at least one name along with Paul’s name in the initial greeting in the letter. In Galatians, Paul does not refer to any specific individuals, but he does refer to “all the brothers who are with me”.

4 Given time, it would be worth exploring this thought further. It should be noted that at the time this letter was written, Timothy had just returned from Thessalonica and had, thus, spent more time with the saints in Thessalonica than had Paul. Perhaps the fact that Timothy knew the saints in Thessalonica more intimately than Paul contributed to the way in which the letter was written.

5 See, for instance, 1 Thessalonians 2:18 and 5:27.

6 On this trip, the team had also established churches in Philippi and Berea. Paul and his companions certainly prayed for these churches as well (see Philippians 1:3-4).

The manner in which Paul and his companions prayed is detailed in verses two and three.

*We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3*

First, it should be noted that the prayers that Paul and his companions prayed were prayers of thanksgiving.<sup>7</sup> Paul refers to three specific things for which he and his team thanked God: the Thessalonian church's "work of faith", their "labor of love", and their "steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ".

"Work of faith" means, as the NIV indicates, "work produced by faith". That is, Paul and his companions recognized that the good works the Thessalonian church were doing didn't just happen. They were produced because of the Thessalonian believers' faith in Jesus. Our faith should produce good works. It should trouble us deeply if works do not accompany our faith, for our lack of works just might indicate that we do not have true saving faith. Works do not save us. However, as the following verses make clear, they are the result of being saved.

*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:8-10*

Paul and his companions also thanked God for the church's "labor of love". In other words, love moved the church to labor. The NIV captures this sense well, rendering the phrase "labor of love" as "your labor prompted by love". God's love had been poured into the hearts of the believers in Thessalonica.<sup>8</sup> The church didn't do what they were doing because of a sense of duty alone but because God's love moved them to labor for his purposes. God was deserving of thanks for putting his love into the believers' hearts and for moving them to labor with that love. This love colored all of their work for the Lord.

Finally, Paul and his companions thanked God for the "steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" that was evident in the church. Paul is referring to the steadfastness—the ability to endure in difficult circumstances—which was produced in them because of the hope they had in the return of the Lord Jesus. Hope is roughly equivalent to expectation. The church was eagerly expecting the return of the Lord Jesus. This produced in them the steadfastness necessary to stand in the face of severe suffering.<sup>9</sup> They were able to continue functioning in spite of this suffering because their hope had produced endurance in them.

Hope is, as Paul indicates in 1 Thessalonians 5:8, like a helmet. It protects us from the depression and despair into which we might fall because of the attacks we are experiencing today. We can endure any difficulty because we know that we have something better coming tomorrow.<sup>10</sup>

In spite of great tribulation, the church in Thessalonica hadn't fallen into depression or despair. Their hope in the coming of the Lord Jesus had produced great steadfastness in them. This steadfastness, too, was a gift from God—something for which he must be thanked.

The content of these prayers is striking. I wonder how many of us have the spiritual depth to pray in this manner. Could it be that God is not thanked in this way because we do understand, except in the most rudimentary fashion, what he is actually doing in and for the saints? May God open our eyes to where and how he is working and may he move us to thank him as we ought.

## GOD'S CHOOSING OF THE THESSALONIANS

Why did Paul and his companions spend so much time thanking God for the work he had done among the Thessalonians? The unexpected answer is found in verses four and five.

7 Of course, although it is not mentioned here, God needed to be thanked for the fact that the Thessalonian Christians had heard and accepted the gospel. This was a miracle from God, for, as Jesus said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6:44). God had drawn certain persons in Thessalonica to himself. He needed to be thanked for this gracious act of drawing.

8 See Romans 5:5.

9 See verse 6.

10 See also Romans 8:23-25.

## WEEK TWO

### 1 THESSALONIANS 1

*For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.* 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5a

Paul and his companions thanked God for these “brothers loved by God” because they were convinced—by certain things that had happened—that God had chosen them.<sup>11</sup> It is significant to note that Paul does not say that these Thessalonians had chosen God. Rather, Paul emphasizes that God had chosen them.

How did Paul and his companions know that God had chosen these Thessalonians? They knew it because three specific things had happened when the gospel had been preached to these Thessalonians: one, the gospel came to them “in power”, two, the gospel came to them “in the Holy Spirit”, and three, the gospel came to them “with full conviction”. In other words, the manner in which the gospel came to the Thessalonians demonstrated that God had, indeed, chosen these people.

But what does this mean? The phrase “he has chosen you” refers to God’s act of choosing (sometimes referred to as electing) individuals to receive eternal life.

Election is one of the great concepts of the Bible, and it looms large in both Testaments. It is often misrepresented .... God is pictured as an arbitrary tyrant, damning or saving people without rhyme or reason. Against all such views we must insist that election, as Paul’s words imply, proceeds from the fact of God’s great love (notice the connection between love and election also in 2 Thess. 2:13). It is not a device for sentencing people to eternal torment, but for rescuing them from it. Election protects us from thinking of salvation as dependent on human whims, and roots it squarely in the will of God. Left to ourselves, we do not wish to leave our state of untroubled sinfulness. It is only because God first convicts us and enables us that we can make even the motion of wanting to turn from our sins.<sup>12</sup>

When did God choose these Thessalonians? This passage doesn’t indicate when this event happened. However, as Ephesians 1:4 makes clear, God chooses people “before the foundation of the world”. Thus, before the creation of the world, God had chosen the specific Thessalonians to whom Paul was writing to be saved. Paul and his companions recognized the fact that God had previously chosen these people because of the manner in which the gospel came to them. This, the fact that God had loved these people and had chosen them, is why they thanked God.

It is important to remember that the gospel hadn’t come “in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction” to all those in Thessalonica. In fact, many people had bitterly opposed Paul, Silas, and Timothy when they first preached the gospel there. The gospel came to many of those in Thessalonica not as a thing to be loved but as a thing to be hated.

However, to other people, those whom God had chosen, the gospel came in an entirely different manner. The message of the gospel came to them with overwhelming power. When the gospel was preached (i.e., the message of Christ’s life, death, resurrection, and ascension), the words struck those who were later to believe with great force. The Holy Spirit moved on them and stirred their hearts, causing the gospel to come to them “with full conviction”. That is, the Thessalonians embraced the gospel being fully convinced that it was true and that, consequently, they had been saved.<sup>13</sup>

Paul says that the fact that the Thessalonians *believed* the gospel when he preached it (“for our gospel came to you ... in power ... and with full conviction”) *is the reason he knows that God chose them*. As soon as they came to faith Paul concluded that long ago God had chosen them, and therefore they had believed when he preached. He later writes to the same church, “We are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by God, because God *chose you from the beginning to be saved*, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth” (2 Thess. 2:13).<sup>14</sup>

11 The connection between the love of God and his calling of people (election) may also be seen in 2 Thessalonians 2:13 and Romans 11:28.

12 Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), 43-44

13 The word translated “conviction” here can also be translated as “assurance”. Both the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB) and the New Living Translation (NLT) translate this word (*plērophoria*) as assurance in this verse.

14 Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994), 672.

## THE JOY AND AFFLICTIONS OF THE THESSALONIANS

Upon the Thessalonians' acceptance of the gospel, several things happened. First, the new Christians began imitating Paul and his companions and, significantly, the Lord.

*You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord ...* 1 Thessalonians 1:5b-6a

How did the believers imitate Paul and his companions and the Lord? Their imitation was expressed in the manner in which they received the word of God.

*... for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit ...*  
1 Thessalonians 1:6b

The new believers, like Paul and his companions and like the Lord Jesus himself, received the word of God “in much affliction”. However, this affliction didn’t result in a jaded, unhappy community of believers desperately clinging to life. Rather, the Holy Spirit’s joy spilled over the believers.<sup>15</sup> The result of this was that they became an example to believers not only throughout their own region but also “everywhere”.

*... so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.* 1 Thessalonians 1:7-10

The gospel came to the Thessalonians—to those who had been called—in great power. Although they had been, at least some of them, idol worshippers, these men and women “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God”. Their new status as followers of Jesus had not, in many ways, made their lives easier. But their joy had increased and their lives were now impacting those living in communities far beyond Thessalonica.

How did these believers maintain their joy and positive attitudes in the midst of their great affliction? Paul’s words in verse ten are quite instructive: these believers were actively waiting “for [God’s] Son from heaven”. The Thessalonian believers could see beyond their present afflictions. They knew that Jesus was, as he had promised, coming back. They took this promise literally. They truly were waiting for his return.<sup>16</sup>

It is important to note the additional descriptors Paul adds regarding Jesus. Immediately after he says, “to wait for his Son from heaven”, Paul further describes Jesus as the one whom God “raised from the dead” and the one “who delivers us from the wrath to come”. Both of these facts concern the wrath of God. Jesus’ resurrection means sinners can joyfully receive forgiveness from God because the wrath they should have received for their sins has been poured out on Jesus. The proof that his sacrifice was accepted by God is the fact that God raised him from the dead.

However, the fact that God poured out his wrath on Jesus while he was on the cross does not mean that God will never again pour out his wrath on *any* humans. There is a terrible day coming for those who do not trust in Jesus and the sacrifice he made. In Romans 2:5, Paul describes this terrible day as “the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed”. Only those who trust in Jesus and the sacrifice that he made for them will be delivered from the wrath that is to come.

## WEEK TWO

### 1 THESSALONIANS 1

15 This combination—suffering and joy—is exactly what Jesus had promised his disciples that they would receive. They would suffer great persecution from the world (see John 15:18-25), and they would be filled with his joy (see John 15:11).

16 See, again, 1 Thessalonians 1:3.



## WEEK TWO

### 1 THESSALONIANS 1

Paul will come back to the subject of Jesus' return and the deliverance his return will bring later in this letter. This brief mention of Jesus' return at this point in the letter served to remind the Thessalonian believers that, no matter how much affliction they were currently facing, their day of deliverance was coming. Of course, their deliverance had already come in a very large sense (hence their overflowing joy), but their total deliverance was yet to come.

Paul's words here should remind the Christian that today's afflictions are "light" and "momentary". There are better days ahead.

*So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18*

May God tune our hearts so that we, like the Thessalonian believers, joyfully accept hardship today even as we anticipate the better day that is to come.

# *Week Three*

## **1 THESSALONIANS 2**

## WEEK THREE

### 1 THESSALONIANS 2

#### DAY ONE

Read 1 Thessalonians 2 through twice. The first time through the chapter, simply read the text. Do not write any notes regarding the chapter at this time. The second time through the chapter, circle or underline key words or phrases and write down any questions or thoughts the chapter leaves you with in the margin. If the verses bring any related Scriptures to mind, please write them in the margin.

#### 1 THESSALONIANS 2

<sup>1</sup> For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. <sup>2</sup> But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. <sup>3</sup> For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, <sup>4</sup> but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. <sup>5</sup> For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. <sup>6</sup> Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. <sup>7</sup> But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. <sup>8</sup> So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. <sup>9</sup> For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. <sup>10</sup> You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. <sup>11</sup> For you know how, like a father with his children, <sup>12</sup> we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. <sup>13</sup> And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. <sup>14</sup> For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, <sup>15</sup> who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind <sup>16</sup> by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But God’s wrath has come upon them at last! <sup>17</sup> But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, <sup>18</sup> because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us. <sup>19</sup> For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? <sup>20</sup> For you are our glory and joy.

#### DAY TWO

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

1. In 1 Thessalonians 2, Paul presents an extended apology (defense) regarding the manner in which his team preached the gospel in Thessalonica. Why might such an apology be valuable to the saints in Thessalonica?

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2. What value is there to saints today in reading an apology like this?

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3. How does Paul describe the manner in which he, Silas, and Timothy worked in Thessalonica in verses 1-8?

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4. What was the motivation behind the team's work in Thessalonica?

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5. What does Paul mean by the statement, "we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves" (verse 8)?

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6. Is it possible to truly preach the gospel without, at the same time, sharing yourself? Why or why not?

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### DAY THREE

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:9-12

7. Why do you think it was important that Paul and his companions worked while they were sharing the gospel in Thessalonica? Aside from providing for their own needs, what might this have accomplished?

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## WEEK THREE

### 1 THESSALONIANS 2

## WEEK THREE

### 1 THESSALONIANS 2

8. In verse 7, Paul compared their labor in Thessalonica to that of a nursing mother. To what does he compare it in verse 11?

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9. Read verse 12 carefully. Describe the way Paul and his team worked with the individuals in Thessalonica.

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10. What application can Christian leaders today take from these verses in regard to how the gospel should be proclaimed?

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#### DAY FOUR

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16

11. How does Paul describe the word of God in verse 13?

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12. Do you hear and respond to the word as if this was actually true?

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13. How were the believers in Thessalonica similar to “the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea” (in this verse, Judea is probably referring not only to the area in and around Jerusalem but also to all of Israel)?

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14. According to verses 15 and 16, what actions did the Jews take against the gospel?

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15. In what way did the Jews in Judea “oppose all mankind”?

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16. What was the result of their opposition of God and the gospel?

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## DAY FIVE

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20

17. What reason does Paul give for his extended absence from Thessalonica?

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18. What does this tell you about the work of Satan?

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19. What does this tell you about the work of God in the world?

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20. In what way were the Thessalonians the “hope or joy or crown of boasting before [the] Lord Jesus” of Paul and his team?

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21. When will the Thessalonians be the “hope or joy or crown of boasting” of Paul and his team? What does this tell you about that event?

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## WEEK THREE

### 1 THESSALONIANS 2



## WEEK THREE

### 1 THESSALONIANS 2

#### DAY SIX

22. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week, the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

#### PAUL'S APOLOGY

There is a definite note of defensiveness ringing throughout this chapter (Bible scholars would refer to this as an *apologetic* section). This is not the ugly sort of defensiveness that you or I are prone to exhibit when we're wrong but we don't want to admit it. Rather, in this chapter Paul musters a well-reasoned defense of the manner and methods in which the gospel came to Thessalonica and of the apostolic team's lengthy absence from the city.

Before examining the apology itself, it is worth considering why the Holy Spirit led Paul to include this lengthy apology in the letter. It was not, as the following verse makes clear, because the Christians in Thessalonica had turned against Paul and his fellow workers.

*But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you ...* 1 Thessalonians 3:6

Nor was it because the Christians in Thessalonica had turned against the gospel.

*And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.* 1 Thessalonians 1:6-8

It is quite possible that Paul, by the Holy Spirit's prompting, included this section because he knew that Satan may use Paul's prolonged absence from Thessalonica as a means to deceive and harm the church. After all, like the traveling philosophers that frequented cities like Thessalonica, Paul had come, convinced a group of people about something new and different, and vanished. Paul knew that others might use these facts to persuade the church in Thessalonica that he and his apostolic team were no different from any other snake-oil salesmen traveling the Via Egnatia.

#### THE METHODS USED BY PAUL AND HIS TEAM

To counter arguments that those within the church had been hoodwinked by a slick-talking band of philosophers looking to make a quick profit, Paul wrote an apology regarding the manner of his team's ministry in Thessalonica and the behavior of the team while they lived among the Thessalonians. He concludes the chapter by telling the Thessalonians why he and his team had not returned since their original visit.

It is important to note the number of times Paul uses the phrase "you know" and similar phrases in this apology (see verses 1, 2, 5, 9, 10, and 11). He wants the believers in Thessalonica to remember the events that took place when the gospel was presented to them. Thus, Paul is counting on the fact that it won't be his words alone that will distinguish his team's coming from that of any other philosopher. Rather, by calling the Thessalonians to remember the way in which his team had ministered and lived among them, Paul is using the memories of the Thessalonians as a key component of his defense, all to ensure that Satan will not damage the church with false accusations (he is, after all, called "the accuser of our brothers").<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Revelation 12:10.

Paul begins his apology by reminding the Thessalonians of the success of the mission.

*For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain.*  
1 Thessalonians 2:1

The brothers (and sisters) in Thessalonica knew that the coming of Paul and his companions had not been in vain because the proclamation of the gospel had resulted in their salvation. The successful results hadn't been easy.

*But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.* 1 Thessalonians 2:2

In spite of the terrible treatment they had endured in Philippi (the backs of Paul and Silas still hadn't healed from the beating they had received),<sup>2</sup> Paul and his companions boldly threw themselves into the same potentially dangerous situation once again (shady philosophers don't normally do that—they shy away from pain).

The boldness displayed by Paul and his companions was not due to their trust in their own naturally courageous personalities. Rather, they “had boldness in [their] God” to preach the gospel. It is absolutely vital that we do not miss this fact. Paul and his companions were able to boldly enter Thessalonica and to preach the incredibly divisive message of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ to its inhabitants because their confidence was based on the person and character and promises of God and the fact that he had called them to preach this gospel. This kind of boldness comes from knowing God and knowing what he has called you to do.

In the next few verses of this apologetic section of this letter, Paul defends the manner in which the gospel actually came to the Thessalonians. He does this negatively and he does it positively. He begins negatively by describing the ways in which the gospel message did not come.

*For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ.* 1 Thessalonians 2:3-6<sup>3</sup>

Paul and his companions knew that God had entrusted them with the gospel. Since he had called them to this great task, the team knew that he would be judging them based on how they performed it. This wouldn't be simply a judgement based on external conditions (i.e., the number of Thessalonians turning from idols to serve Christ). Rather, he would be testing their hearts. Paul and his team needed to work in such a way that they might please him. Error, impurity, deception, flattery, greed, and glory-seeking would not be pleasing to God. Paul considers this fact—the fact that he and his companions were working to please God—to be of such great importance that he calls God himself as his key witness to the fact that they had, indeed, done this: “God is witness”.

Paul moves from the negative to the positive in verses seven and eight. These verses describe the God-pleasing methods Paul and his team employed in Thessalonica.

*But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.* 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8

Paul's vivid portrayal of the team's ministry among the Thessalonians should be highly instructive about the manner in which the gospel grows. When we share the gospel, we also must share ourselves. This sharing is similar to the way a nursing mother cares for her child. A nursing mother

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### 1 THESSALONIANS 2

2 See Acts 16:19-39. Timothy, unlike Paul and Silas, was not beaten and imprisoned in Philippi.

3 Remember that Paul didn't mention the fact that he was an apostle in the opening verses of this book? He finally mentions it in 2:6.

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### 1 THESSALONIANS 2

sacrifices herself in order to care for her baby. She loses sleep, she rearranges her schedule, she changes her diet, and she sacrifices her body so that the baby might prosper. The same was true of Paul and his companions. It must be true of those who would proclaim the gospel today.

*For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. 1 Thessalonians 2:9*

Paul reminds the Thessalonians that he and his fellow workers worked night and day—perhaps making tents during the day and preaching at night (or vice-versa)—so that the Thessalonians wouldn’t be burdened by the preachers. Again, we see that Paul and his team didn’t use the Thessalonians for personal gain. Instead, everything they did proved their love and commitment to the new believers.

*You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12*

Notice the change in metaphors here. In addition to behaving like a nursing mother, Paul and his companions were also like a father with his children, exhorting, encouraging, and charging the Thessalonians “to walk in a manner worthy of God”. This exhorting, encouraging, and charging wasn’t just done by blanket statements to the whole church (although this probably happened as Paul preached to the gathered church). Rather, Paul indicates that they “exhorted each one of you”. What love! Just imagine the fatherly conversations that took place with individual believers. This is true ministry!

Why did the ministry happen in this way? It seems that Paul knew no other way. He, Silas, and Timothy recognized that God had called the Thessalonians “into his own kingdom and glory”. They knew he had chosen them (see 1 Thessalonians 1:4), and they knew that the Thessalonians must now “walk in a manner worthy of God”. Paul wasn’t building his own kingdom. Rather, he recognized that God was building “his own kingdom and glory” through the Thessalonians.

### THE MESSAGE PREACHED BY PAUL AND HIS TEAM

Paul has clearly distanced the methods he and his companions used in Thessalonica from the methods employed by other philosophers. In verse 13, he turns his attention from methods to the message.

*And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. 1 Thessalonians 2:13*

The Thessalonian believers received God’s word as God’s word *to them*. It brought—and was still bringing—great change to their lives. However, as the following verses make clear, not all of these changes yielded pleasant results.

*For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But God’s wrath has come upon them at last! 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16*

How did Paul and his companions know that the Thessalonians had received God’s word as God’s word to them? They knew it because of the actions taken by the believers in Thessalonica. Upon receipt of God’s word, these believers “became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea”.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Churches “in Judea”, as used here, probably refers not only to the churches located in and around Jerusalem but also to the churches located in other areas of Israel. These churches suffered incredible persecution from the Jews. Years earlier, Paul himself had been one of the persecutors of the churches in Judea.

I don't think this imitation was intentional. That is, the church in Thessalonica wasn't purposely trying to be like the churches in Judea. Rather, this imitation simply happened. In the same way that the churches in Israel suffered intense persecution from their fellow countrymen (in their case, Jews), the Thessalonians believers suffered intense persecution from their fellow countrymen (Gentiles).

Paul summarizes the Jewish persecution of the Judean church in four statements: (1) they "killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets", (2) they "drove us out", (3) they "displease God", and (4) they "oppose all mankind by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved".<sup>5</sup>

However, lest any of the Thessalonians should think that God had turned a blind eye to this persecution in Judea (and would, likely, turn a blind eye to the persecution in Thessalonica), Paul is quick to point out that the Jewish persecutors were "fill[ing] up the measure of their sins" and that "God's wrath has come upon them at last!".

These statements should have served to encourage the church in Thessalonica in at least two ways. First, the Thessalonians learned that they were not suffering alone. Others—including the "mother" church in Judea—were suffering too. Sometimes, the best encouragement we can receive is the news that others have suffered just like us. Second, the Thessalonians were reminded that God sees persecution and repays the persecutors. He hadn't forgotten about the churches in Judea, and he wouldn't forget about the church in Thessalonica, either. The persecutors wouldn't get away with their persecution forever.

## SATAN'S HINDRANCE

All of this should have been greatly encouraging to the Thessalonians. Paul had, by his words to this point, strengthened the believers and cut-off almost every attack that non-believers might muster against the church on account of his ministry in the city. There was, however, one remaining sticky issue that Paul needed to address in his words to the Thessalonians. Why hadn't he returned? In verses 17 through 3:10, Paul defends his prolonged absence from these believers.

*But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us.*  
1 Thessalonians 2:17-18

Paul's initial departure from the city hadn't been his idea. He and his companions were "torn away" from the Thessalonians.<sup>6</sup> But, while they may have been absent in person, they were present in heart. Paul and his companions desperately wanted to return to the church in Thessalonica (remember, Timothy had been able to return to the church). In fact, Paul tried to return several times but was not able to return because, in his own words, "Satan hindered us".

Paul's reference to Satan here is worthy of some consideration. How Satan resisted Paul is not made clear nor is it important to know. The fact of his interference in Paul's ministry and of Paul's recognition of that interference is important to know. Paul knew that the devil was scheming against him and that he needed to stand against those schemes.<sup>7</sup> He knew that "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). The knowledge of Satan's work did not lead Paul to despair. Rather, it caused him to fight.

Satan does not have unlimited power. He, like everything else in all creation, is ruled by Jesus. He is far beneath Jesus' feet. His very existence is due to the work of Jesus. His continued existence is for the glory of Jesus.<sup>8</sup> We must recognize that everything he does is permitted by the Lord. Thus, God allowed Satan to hinder Paul from returning to Thessalonica. Why would he do this? There are many possible answers (Paul's absence would cause the church to grow on its own, etc., etc., etc.) but none are given here.

5 This last statement is worthy of some deep thought. Persecution of believers isn't just opposition of God. It is also opposition of mankind because persecutors are working to prevent people from hearing the truth and receiving salvation.

6 This "tearing away" is recorded in Acts 17:1-10.

7 See Ephesians 6:11.

8 See Ephesians 1:20-23 and Colossians 1:15-17.

## WEEK THREE

### 1 THESSALONIANS 2

The reason Paul referred to Satan was not to strike fear in the hearts of the Thessalonians (e.g., “Oh no, Satan is against us!”). It was to demonstrate that he and his team would do anything possible to be with the Thessalonians. You see, Paul and his companions didn’t just see the Thessalonians as fellow believers to whom they hoped to return. They were far more significant to the apostles than that.

*For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy. 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20*

The Thessalonians were the “glory and joy” of the apostolic team. It is significant to note that this glory and this joy were won with great suffering. Like our Savior, we are called to suffer in this world. But this suffering, referred to elsewhere as “light momentary affliction” brings with it tremendous reward. It is “preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (2 Corinthians 4:17).

It is significant to note *when* the Thessalonians will be the apostolic team’s “hope or joy or crown of boasting”. This will happen, Paul says, “before our Lord Jesus *at his coming*”. Thus, Paul expects that the Thessalonians will be a badge of honor (of sorts) that he and his team will “wear” at the coming of Jesus.

The word translated “coming” here is no ordinary word. This specific word (the Greek word *parousia*) is used in the New Testament “in a special technical sense ... of Christ”.<sup>9</sup> *Parousia* appears three more times in 1 Thessalonians<sup>10</sup> and two times (in reference to Christ) in 2 Thessalonians.<sup>11</sup>

It is easy to see why the New Testament authors (by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) applied this particular word to the coming of Christ, for *parousia*, as it was used by non-Christians, came to mean one of two things—both of which directly apply to Christ! First, *parousia* was used to refer to “the coming of a hidden divinity, who makes his presence felt by a revelation of his power”.<sup>12</sup> Second, it “became the official term for a visit of a person of high rank, esp. of kings and emperors visiting a province”.<sup>13</sup>

Jesus’ coming will be both of these things. One, at his *parousia* he will be unveiled for all to see. He has been the “hidden divinity”, if you will, for 2,000 years now. One day, he will be hidden no longer. At his *parousia*, he will make “his presence felt by a revelation of his power”. Two, his *parousia* will be the *Parousia* of *parousias*. It will be a visit of the person of highest rank—the King of kings visiting his own dominion (earth) for an extended stay (forever).

Paul was anxiously awaiting Christ’s *parousia*, because on that day he would exhibit the Thessalonians as examples of his love and loyalty to Christ. The crowns we will one day wear—and joyfully cast at the feet of Jesus—are not earned in easy chairs. If ever you wondered why a missionary would risk all to go to a dangerous mission field, now you know. There is treasure in that place. There is also treasure right in front of you. May we, like Paul, Silas, and Timothy (and countless millions before and after them), see the treasure in the midst of the trials and do whatever it takes to secure that treasure. Jesus is coming.

9. F.W. Danker, et al., eds. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 780.

10. See also 1 Thessalonians 3:13, 4:15, and 5:23.

11. See 2 Thessalonians 2:1 and 2:8. The third use of this word in 2 Thessalonians (2:9) is in reference to the coming of the antichrist.

12. Danker, BDAG, 780.

13. Danker, BDAG, 781.

# *Week Four*

## **1 THESSALONIANS 3**

## WEEK FOUR

### 1 THESSALONIANS 3

#### DAY ONE

Read 1 Thessalonians 3 through twice. The first time through the chapter, simply read the text. Do not write any notes regarding the chapter at this time. The second time through the chapter, circle or underline key words or phrases and write down any questions or thoughts the chapter leaves you with in the margin. If the verses bring any related Scriptures to mind, please write them in the margin.

#### 1 THESSALONIANS 3

*<sup>1</sup> Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, <sup>2</sup> and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, <sup>3</sup> that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. <sup>4</sup> For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know. <sup>5</sup> For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.*

*<sup>6</sup> But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you— <sup>7</sup> for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith. <sup>8</sup> For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord. <sup>9</sup> For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, <sup>10</sup> as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?*

*<sup>11</sup> Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, <sup>12</sup> and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, <sup>13</sup> so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.*

#### DAY TWO

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5

1. What two things was Timothy to do when, after being sent by Paul, he arrived in Thessalonica?

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2. What did Paul fear might happen to the saints in Thessalonica if Timothy didn't do these two things?

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3. How do you think Timothy was to do this? See also Paul's commands to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:11-16, 1 Timothy 5:17, and 2 Timothy 3:14-4:2

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4. Based on these verses, what level of influence and authority should the word of God have in the local church?

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5. How can the church structure itself so that this becomes a reality?

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6. Does the word of God have this level of influence and authority in your life? How can you structure your life so that this becomes a reality?

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### DAY THREE

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5

7. Paul was concerned that the saints in Thessalonica might be “moved by these afflictions”. Describe the afflictions the Thessalonian church was facing. 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16

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8. Why wasn't Paul surprised that the church was suffering affliction?

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## WEEK FOUR

### 1 THESSALONIANS 3

9. Based on the following verses, provide several reasons why the church should expect that it will suffer affliction. *John 15:18-25*

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10. Paul and his companions “kept telling” the saints in Thessalonica that they would “suffer affliction”. What value would there be in constantly reminding the saints of this? *See also John 16:1-4*

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11. Are you ever reminded of this fact? What would change in your life if those preaching to you “kept telling” you that you would suffer affliction?

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12. What are the long-term implications of preaching the gospel and avoiding the message of the affliction which accompanies it?

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13. What application can Christian leaders today take from these verses in regard to how the gospel should be proclaimed in the church?

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### DAY FOUR

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:6-10

14. What did Timothy find when he came to Thessalonica?

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15. To what do you attribute their spiritual health?

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16. How did the news of the Thessalonians' spiritual condition affect Paul and his companions?

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17. Describe the bond between Paul and his companions and the Thessalonians. What does this tell you about the work of the gospel?

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18. What did Paul and his companions do in response to the news that Timothy brought from Thessalonica?

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## DAY FIVE

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

19. Verses 11 through 13 are a blessing. What does Paul ask God to do?

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20. Read verse 13 carefully. Why does Paul want God to do the things outlined in verses 11 and 12?

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21. Do you live with this event in mind? Based on Paul's words in these verses, are you ready for this event?

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## WEEK FOUR

### 1 THESSALONIANS 3

## WEEK FOUR

### 1 THESSALONIANS 3

#### DAY SIX

22. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week, the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

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#### TIMOTHY'S MISSION

We still—even after two chapters—have not reached the *didactic* (teaching) portion of this letter (that is not to say that we can't learn from every part of these letters). However, before he instructs the church on important matters, Paul needs to complete his apology. Remember, at the conclusion of chapter two, Paul explained why he hadn't returned to Thessalonica yet (he had been hindered by Satan).

*Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. 1 Thessalonians 3:1-3*

Paul's words here paint a vivid picture of the unseen side of apostolic ministry. The book of Acts records the external beatings endured by the apostle and his companions. It does not, however, focus on the "internal beatings" they endured (i.e., the constant anxiety Paul experienced because of his concern for the church). It seems, based on Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 11, that these internal beatings were considered by Paul to be at least as difficult to endure as the external beatings. After providing a long list of physical tortures and troubles he endured, Paul describes the internal troubles he endured.

*And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant? 2 Corinthians 11:28-29*

Paul, Silas, and Timothy knew the afflictions that the church in Thessalonica were facing. The saints were, as Paul indicated in chapter two, suffering intense persecution "from [their] own countrymen" (1 Thessalonians 2:14). The afflictions themselves were no surprise to the apostles. Indeed, Paul indicates that "we are destined for this". However, Paul and his team knew that the afflictions could, if the believers in Thessalonica were unprepared, be disastrous. This is why the team sent Timothy to "establish and exhort" the Thessalonians in their faith.

In these verses we find the remarkable statement that Timothy is "God's coworker in the gospel of Christ".<sup>1</sup> Just think, Paul indicates that Timothy was working not only *for God* but also *with him* for the advance of his kingdom! "God's coworker" is the loftiest of titles ... and one no person (apart from Christ) could claim as his own. But this is what our God does. He takes us from the muck and mire of our sin and he brings us to a place where we can even be called his coworkers.

Timothy was God's coworker "in the gospel of Christ". The words "of Christ" are extremely significant for they define the nature of the gospel. The gospel is described as being "the gospel of Christ" because its entire content is based on Christ's life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Quite simply, there is no gospel apart from Christ.

<sup>1</sup> See also 1 Corinthians 3:9.

As “God’s coworker in the gospel of Christ”, Timothy’s role was to “establish and exhort [the Thessalonians] in [their] faith”. The Thessalonians were Christians, but they were baby Christians. Timothy’s job was to help them grow up.

1 Thessalonians 3 does not indicate how Timothy was to do this. Fortunately, based on Paul’s instructions to Timothy elsewhere, it is clear how Paul would have told Timothy to do this: he would have told him to bring them to the Scriptures.

*Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. 1 Timothy 4:13*

*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.*

*I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. 2 Timothy 3:14-4:2*

We must become people of the Word. We must devote ourselves to it. It was purposely “breathed out by God” for the purpose of establishing and encouraging those within the church. Elders in the church must be able and willing to use it, knowing that it will, when applied diligently and carefully, do what God has created it to do. Saints in the church must desire it and plant it deep in their hearts. Saints who have been established and encouraged by the application of the Scriptures will not be easily moved by afflictions.

Afflictions will come, and they will take a toll on those who have not been established in God’s Word. This was why Paul was so concerned about the Thessalonians. He knew difficult days were coming for these new saints (indeed, he knew they were already in them). What he didn’t know was if the saints would be able to stand fast during those days.

*For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know. For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain. 1 Thessalonians 3:4-5*

How long Paul was forced to remain in suspense is unclear.

We cannot be sure whether Timothy traveled by land or sea, but whatever his route and means of transport the journey was not a short one. The trip from Athens to Thessalonica was approximately 220 miles (350 km.) overland, a journey that would have taken ten to eleven days. If Timothy had remained there for a minimum of a week, the whole trip from Athens to Thessalonica and then to Corinth beyond Athens would have taken approximately a month.<sup>2</sup>

I would guess Paul would have gladly chosen 39 lashes rather than being forced to wait a whole month to learn about the condition of the church in Thessalonica. But the wait was worth it. The saints, Timothy reported, were thriving.

*But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you—for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith. For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 3:6-8*

<sup>2</sup> Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 166.

## WEEK FOUR

### 1 THESSALONIANS 3

Timothy's return drove all of Paul's anxiety away (at least concerning that one church in that one city for that one day!). It brought him great joy. I can just imagine him asking Timothy to tell him, several different times, specific stories of the saints' health.

Timothy's return poured fuel on Paul's already blazing prayer life. Ironically, it didn't dampen his desire to return to the church. If anything, it increased his desire to see the saints.

However, while Paul's heart for the saints is certainly worthy of admiration and imitation, we must not focus our attention on him. It is God who demands our attention. He is the hero of this story. Paul recognizes this fact. He doesn't know how he can thank God enough for the report that Timothy brought back. When he considers all that has transpired, Paul is at a loss for words. God has, once again, stunned him.

*For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?*

*Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13*

Do you see the greatness of our God? We have a mission that has been prematurely cut-off, saints who have been under-prepared, non-believers persecuting the church, an enemy (the tempter) looking to destroy the church, and an apostle being forced to watch from the sidelines. The only hope is a member of the junior varsity (Timothy) sent into what is clearly a varsity-level match-up. Yet the church is thriving!

God, it is clear, doesn't mind stacking the odds against himself. It only serves to show his greatness all the more clearly. As Jesus said, "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18). We, as his coworkers, can only stand back and watch in amazement.

The success of the church, however, should never cause us to take a breather. Paul sets our example here. The church is thriving, but he doesn't quit. Rather, he prays for their continued success. He asks God to "establish [their] hearts blameless in holiness" at "the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints". There's that word *parousia* again. Paul clearly sees the coming of Christ (when he will be unveiled for all to see and when he will—as King of kings—come to visit his dominion and stay here forever) as his finish line.

Paul's words at the end of chapter three are echoed at the end of chapter five.

*Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it. 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24*

God is faithful and Jesus is coming. May we never forget either of these truths.

# *Week Five*

## **1 THESSALONIANS 4**

## WEEK FIVE

### 1 THESSALONIANS 4

#### DAY ONE

Read 1 Thessalonians 4 through twice. The first time through the chapter, simply read the text. Do not write any notes regarding the chapter at this time. The second time through the chapter, circle or underline key words or phrases and write down any questions or thoughts the chapter leaves you with in the margin. If the verses bring any related Scriptures to mind, please write them in the margin.

#### 1 THESSALONIANS 4

*<sup>1</sup> Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. <sup>2</sup> For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. <sup>3</sup> For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; <sup>4</sup> that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, <sup>5</sup> not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; <sup>6</sup> that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. <sup>7</sup> For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. <sup>8</sup> Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.*

*<sup>9</sup> Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, <sup>10</sup> for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, <sup>11</sup> and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, <sup>12</sup> so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.*

*<sup>13</sup> But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. <sup>15</sup> For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. <sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage one another with these words.*

#### DAY TWO

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

1. These verses concern “how you ought to walk and to please God”. How, based on verses 1-8, is the Christian to do this?

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2. In verse 6 Paul says that God is “an avenger in all these things”. What does this mean? *See also Hebrews 12:14-17 and 13:4*

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3. How do you think the Christian is able to live a self-controlled life? *1 Thessalonians 4:4, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, Galatians 5:16-24*

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4. Based on these verses, what would you say to a person who claims to be a Christian but is living in sexual immorality and refuses to repent?

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### DAY THREE

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

5. Four specific instructions are found in verses 9-12. What are they?

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3. 

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4. 

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6. On which of these four, if any, do you need to focus?

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7. Verse 9 indicates that God taught the saints in Thessalonica to love one another. How do you think he did this?

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8. In verse 12, Paul gives the believers two reasons to “work with your hands”. What are they?

1. 

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2. 

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## WEEK FIVE

### 1 THESSALONIANS 4



## WEEK FIVE

### 1 THESSALONIANS 4

9. In what ways do you think our obedience or disobedience to this command impacts the success of our preaching and the growth of the church?

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#### DAY FOUR

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

10. Verses 13 and 14 concern Christians who have died. How does Paul describe them in these verses?

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11. Why would he describe them in this way?

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12. It appears the Thessalonians Christians were confused regarding the destiny of Christians who had died. What was this causing them to do? *1 Thessalonians 4:13*

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13. How does Paul prove that Christians who have died will be resurrected? *1 Thessalonians 4:14-15*

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14. What do the following verses teach about the resurrection of the dead? To whose resurrection is the believer's resurrection tied? What confidence should this give to the believer?

*Romans 8:11*

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*1 Corinthians 6:14*

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*1 Corinthians 15:12-28*

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*2 Corinthians 4:14*

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## DAY FIVE

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18

15. Outline the order of events that will happen at the coming of the Lord.

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16. How would this news have comforted the believers in Thessalonica?

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17. Jesus spoke about his coming and about the resurrection of the dead in great detail. What did he say about these events?

*Matthew 25:31*

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*Mark 13:26-27*

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*John 5:25-29*

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18. According to verse 18, why did Paul write these words regarding the order of the events taking place at the coming of Jesus? Do you use these words in this way?

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## DAY SIX

19. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week, the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

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## WEEK FIVE

### 1 THESSALONIANS 4

## WEEK FIVE

### 1 THESSALONIANS 4

Paul has finally rolled up his sleeves. After three chapters of introductory matters, he is ready to get to work.

Paul introduces this portion of the book with the word “Finally”, but, like so many preachers and teachers, this word should not be taken to mean “I’m about done here”. Paul could stretch out a “finally” section, as demonstrated here, for quite some time.<sup>1</sup>

There are two halves to this chapter. The first half (verses 1-12) relates to the Christians who are living. The second half relates to the Christians who have died (verses 13-18).

### INSTRUCTIONS REGARDING HOLINESS

We begin with the living.

*Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. 1 Thessalonians 4:1*

How we walk—that is, how we live—is either displeasing or pleasing to God. Paul and his team had previously taught the believers how they needed to walk in order to please God. Here, he covers the same territory again.

Paul is not writing these words because the Thessalonians were walking in such a manner that they were displeasing God. He affirms that their walking (i.e., the way in which they were living) was pleasing to God. However, Paul encourages them to “do so more and more”.

Here, then, are specific instructions the believers must keep if they (and we) are to walk in such a way as to please God.

*For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you. 1 Thessalonians 4:2-8*

Paul’s first instructions regard the believer’s sanctification (i.e., holiness). He is not talking about the state of holiness conferred upon a believer at the moment of salvation.<sup>2</sup> Rather, he is talking about the ever-increasing holiness that is to be the mark of a healthy believer throughout his or her life.<sup>3</sup>

These instructions, Paul reminds the believers, were not from Paul. They came from the Lord Jesus. Thus, to disobey these instructions is to disobey the Lord.

Paul begins by discussing sexual purity. Sanctification and sexual immorality do not mix. Paul shows no embarrassment of God’s restrictive standards here. He makes no excuses for believers. Rather, he tells them exactly how they must live if they are going to please God and if they are going to avoid his punishment.

First, the believer is to “know how to control his own body in holiness and honor”. Non-Christians (referred to as “Gentiles” here) are led by their passions. Christians must be self-controlled. This is only possible because of the work God does in the believer. Self-control, as Galatians 5:22-23 makes clear, is evidence of the Holy Spirit’s presence and activity in the believer’s life.

<sup>1</sup> Remember, Paul once killed a young man by his long-windedness (of course, he did raise him to life again). Luke seems to emphasize Paul’s long-windedness with statements like: “and he prolonged his speech until midnight” (Acts 20:7) and “as Paul talked still longer” (Acts 20:9).

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Hebrews 10:10.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Hebrews 10:14.

When we sin sexually, and Paul doesn't describe different types of sexual sins here, our sins always affect others. Always. These sins aren't just private affairs between a person and God. If a Christian man, for instance, commits adultery, he sins against God, his wife, his children, the woman with whom he commits adultery, that woman's husband, etc., etc., etc.. The Christian must not "wrong his brother in this matter". Paul warns the believers that "the Lord is an avenger in all these things". This is no small matter to God. The Christian has been called to holiness and must live in sexual purity.

This is, obviously, a command that needs repeated repeating today (just as Paul was repeating this to the Thessalonians). Christians do not live in some sort of holy snow-globe, shielded from any contact with the evil influences of the world. Pornography has never been more accessible. Homosexuality has never, at least in America, been more accepted. Premarital sex is considered to be normal. Yet, the Christian must not cave-in to the standards of the age. God's standards have not changed.

It is significant that this is Paul's first command to the Thessalonians. Often, Christians wonder what great thing they must do in order to please God. It seems, based on Paul's words here, that one of the first things we can do if we are to please God is to be self-controlled in regard to sexual purity. The Holy Spirit will give you help in this area. Ask him to help you.

"Holy Spirit" is not just a name. It is also a description of who the Spirit is. He is holy. By the way he words verse eight, Paul emphasizes this fact. And, as the *Holy Spirit* lives in the believer, he leads the believer into holiness. Woe to those who refuse to follow his leadings, for "whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God".

## INSTRUCTIONS REGARDING BROTHERLY LOVE

Paul's next instructions concern the manner Christians are to relate to fellow Christians.

*Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more ... 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10*

The Thessalonian Christians were doing a good job at loving their fellow believers. They weren't just loving the believers in Thessalonica, either. The Thessalonian believers demonstrated brotherly love to believers throughout Macedonia (this would be somewhat akin to saying that you were doing a good job at loving believers throughout a several county region).

Paul is not surprised that the believers were loving one another. After all, they had been "taught by God to love one another". How was God teaching them to do this? He was teaching them this through the Holy Spirit who was living in and working through each of the believers (again, see Galatians 5:22-23).

But, for as well as the believers were doing in this area, Paul encourages them "to do this more and more". There seems to be no limit to the love we should show to one another.

It may be surprising how quickly Paul moves from the spiritual (love one another) to the mundane (here's how you should work). It should be noted that nothing is unspiritual to Paul. Everything—even the way one works—can and should be done in a spiritual manner.

*... aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one. 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12*

## WEEK FIVE

### 1 THESSALONIANS 4

This is basic, meat and potatoes Christianity. Christians are not to draw attention to themselves. Instead, they are to quietly go about their business. They are to go on doing this day after day after day.

While there is no open rebuke to be found in Paul's words here, there is some indication, based on his words in 2 Thessalonians 3, that some in the Thessalonian church were not working as hard as they could have been working. Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians are gentle encouragement. His stronger words in 2 Thessalonians could indicate that his gentle encouragement was not heeded.

*Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12*

Paul gives two reasons why Christians need to work hard and to live quietly: one, outsiders are watching and this is the proper way to live before them, and two, Christians are "to be dependent on no one".

Paul's Christianity is definitely of the blue-collar, lunch-pail variety. Everyday, he wants the Christian to avoid sexual immorality, to love their fellow believers, to mind their own business, and to work hard. Immorality is never an acceptable option for the believer. Laziness, in any area of life, is inexcusable. Non-believers are watching. More than that, God is watching. The Christian must "walk in a manner that is worthy of God" (1 Thessalonians 2:12).

Using these instructions as guidelines, it is fairly easy to check (at least on a preliminary level) if you are walking in such a way that you are pleasing God. Are you keeping yourself from sexual immorality? Are you loving fellow believers? Are you minding your own business? Are you working hard? These should be things you can answer quite easily. If you do not find yourself obeying these commands, repent and start keeping them. The Holy Spirit will help you.

### INFORMATION ABOUT CHRISTIANS WHO HAVE DIED

After these initial instructions, Paul turns his attention to teaching the saints about "those who are asleep". He doesn't mean physical sleep. Rather, he is referring to Christians who have died. He does this, perhaps, because the church was somewhat confused about the fate of the Christians among them who had died in the months while Paul had been away.

*But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. 1 Thessalonians 4:13*

Whether the ignorance Paul is writing about was due to lack of teaching about this matter by Paul is not clear (remember, he was forced to leave before he was able to teach them everything they needed to hear). Adding to their confusion was the fact that the Thessalonian Christians probably expected Jesus to come again in the very near future—certainly within their own lifetimes. The death of one or more of the saints would have shocked the church. Death was an unforeseen event.

The shock of death wasn't as painful as the grief the church felt. Paul doesn't say why the church grieved so deeply, but it is possible that the saints thought that only those who were alive when Jesus came back would be brought into his kingdom. Thus, by this thinking, those who died had, by virtue of their deaths, forfeited their place in the kingdom of God. This would certainly cause the church to grieve deeply.

Paul corrects and encourages the saints in Thessalonica by tying the fate of the now-dead saints to Jesus' death and resurrection.

*For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.* 1 Thessalonians 4:14

In his letters, Paul frequently connects the believer's resurrection to Christ's resurrection.<sup>4</sup> For instance, in Romans 8:11 Paul says, "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you".

It is important to understand that when Paul speaks of the resurrection of the believer he is talking about the moment when the believer's body will be raised at Christ's coming. For instance, in 1 Corinthians 15:22-23, Paul says, "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ".

But Paul's teaching that Christians who have died will be resurrected at Christ's coming should not be taken to mean that believers who have died are in some sort of "soul sleep" until that day. Paul clearly taught that when a believer dies, his soul goes to be with Christ. For instance, in his letter to the Philippians, Paul writes, "My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better" (Philippians 1:23).<sup>5</sup> But while the believer's soul goes to be with Jesus immediately upon death, the dead Christian's body will not be raised until the coming of Jesus.

When Jesus comes to the earth, "God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep". This seems to be saying that God will bring those Christians who have died and are with Jesus in heaven back to earth with him at his *parousia*. Paul is probably alluding here to Zechariah 14:5, which reads, "Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him".<sup>6</sup>

Verse 14 is, admittedly, difficult. Just look at the differences between the ESV, NIV, NET, and NASB in their respective renditions of this verse! However, the main point in this verse is clear enough. Namely, in the same way that Christ was raised, the dead believer will be raised by God.

But while verse 14 is not quite as clear as might be desired, in verses 15 through 18 Paul gets very specific about the *parousia* of the Lord and some of the events that will take place on that day. In fact, this is the most clear statement in the New Testament regarding the future "catching up" of the saints (the event referred to as "the rapture" by many people).

*For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.*

1 Thessalonians 4:15-17

There is much to discuss in these verses. Paul begins these verses by stating that they are "by a word from the Lord", however the gospels do not record Jesus speaking these exact words in any place. From where did Paul receive these words which he attributes to Jesus regarding the dead being raised? There are at least three possibilities:

4 See, for instance, 1 Corinthians 6:14, 1 Corinthians 15:12-28, and 2 Corinthians 4:14.

5 See also 2 Corinthians 5:8 and 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10.

6 See also 1 Thessalonians 3:13, which alludes to the same passage.

## WEEK FIVE

### 1 THESSALONIANS 4

1. It is possible that Jesus spoke these words to Paul personally (in the same way Jesus personally spoke with Paul about the Lord's supper).<sup>7</sup>
2. It is possible that Paul based his teaching upon something Jesus said that was recorded in one of the gospels and expanded on that teaching.
3. It is possible that Jesus spoke these words and they were passed down by the apostles but were never recorded in any of the gospels. There were, after all, many things that Jesus did and said that were not recorded in the four gospels.<sup>8</sup>

It is difficult to know which of these three options is the source of Paul's comment here. I am inclined to think Paul is referring to a statement Jesus made that was never recorded. In the end, however, it really makes no difference. The point is, Jesus said these words somewhere.

Jesus actually said quite a bit about the dead being raised and about his *parousia*. He said, for instance, that the dead would be raised at his command.

*"Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. John 5:25-29*

He also said that the angels would gather his elect (i.e., those whom God has chosen to be saved) at his *parousia*. This would include both the dead and the living.

*"And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." Matthew 24:31*

But while Jesus said a good deal about his *parousia*, and he clearly indicated that the dead would be raised, there is no record in the gospels of him saying that the dead would be raised before the living, and Paul insists that Jesus himself said this.

As noted earlier, this passage in Thessalonians is often used as a basis for discussions regarding "the rapture". The word rapture comes from the word used in the Latin translation of the Bible (the Vulgate) to describe the event when believers "will be caught up ... to meet the Lord in the air".

The Greek word translated "caught up" here is also used in John 6:15. There it refers to the people wanting to "take [Jesus] by force" and to make him king. It is also used in Acts 8:39 to describe the moment when the Holy Spirit "carried Philip away". The idea is that God will, via the angels (again, see Matthew 24:31), "gather his elect" and take them to meet Christ.

It is clear from this passage in Thessalonians that there will be a point in time when believers will be "caught up" to meet the Lord in the air. However, it is not at all clear that this event will be like the rapture described in much of the popular literature about this event.

The rapture is often portrayed as a secret event. Yet the event portrayed in this passage seems to be anything but a secret. Indeed, it comes "with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God". The rapture is often portrayed as occurring sometime (perhaps years!) before the coming of Christ. Yet here we find this event occurring at the same time as "the coming of the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:15). In other words, the church is caught up at the *parousia*.

<sup>7</sup> See 1 Corinthians 11:23.

<sup>8</sup> See John 20:30 and 21:25.

Paul does not answer some of the questions we might want answered in this passage. For instance, he doesn't say where the believers go after they have been caught up to be with the Lord. Do they go with the Lord to heaven? Do they return with him to earth? There are hints, perhaps, but no definite answers in these verses.

One such hint is the word *parousia*. Remember, this word refers the unveiling of a hidden deity *and to the arrival of a dignitary for a visit to a province under his dominion*. This would point toward Christ coming to earth to stay. A second hint is discussed in a note in the ESV Study Bible regarding verses 16 and 17:

The Greek term *apantēsis* is often used of an important dignitary's reception by the inhabitants of a city, who come out to greet and welcome their honored guest with fanfare and celebration, then accompany him into the city (cf. Matt. 25:6; Acts 18:15;<sup>9</sup> a related term *hypantēsis* is used in Matt. 25:1; John 12:13). It may indicate that the subsequent movement of the saints after meeting Christ "in the air" conforms to Christ's direction, thus in a downward motion toward the earth. However, some interpreters caution that the vivid symbolism of apocalyptic language must be kept in mind to avoid over-interpretation of the apocalyptic details.<sup>10</sup>

This meeting in the air is somewhat comparable to a family running out to the end of the driveway in order to greet beloved guests who are arriving for a visit. All of us have done this before. We see the lights of the car coming up the road and we run down the driveway, excited to greet those we love at the earliest possible moment. A brief reunion takes place at the end of the driveway, complete with waves and cheers and hellos and hugs. After a little while, the family and the arriving guests complete the journey—together—to the house. This appears to be what will happen when Christ comes. Believers will be taken to meet him and the saints who have died in the air. After a joyous reunion, all of us will, together, complete the journey to the earth. Again, Paul doesn't explicitly say that Jesus and the saints will continue on to earth at this moment. However, the words he uses seem to point in that direction.

Hints such as these are helpful, but many people wish Paul had been a little clearer in this passage, providing more than just hints. It should be stressed, however, that Paul's purpose here is not to answer all questions about the catching up of the church. His purpose is to answer the Thessalonians' question, namely, what happens to those Christians who have died?

Paul concludes the chapter with a simple command: "Therefore encourage one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:18). Thus, Paul would have the Christian use these verses to bring encouragement to other believers.

It must be said that these verses are rarely used for this purpose. Rather, they are normally used as "proof texts" in ongoing arguments about Jesus' coming and the nature of the rapture. That is not why Paul wrote these words. They were written to encourage the saints in Thessalonica regarding the fate of those believers who had died. This is also the primary purpose of the passage now.

The final words in verse 17 are the most encouraging words of all: "and so we will always be with the Lord". In your zeal to understand the timing of end time events, don't lose sight of these words. There is coming a day when we will see Jesus face-to-face. When that day comes, we will never live another day apart from our Lord.

These words were written to give great courage to the living, great hope to the dying, and great comfort to the grieving. May they do the same for you.

9 Acts 18:15 is the wrong passage. This should actually be Acts 28:15.

10 *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2310.



# *Week Six*

## **1 THESSALONIANS 5**

## DAY ONE

Read 1 Thessalonians 5 through twice. The first time through the chapter, simply read the text. Do not write any notes regarding the chapter at this time. The second time through the chapter, circle or underline key words or phrases and write down any questions or thoughts the chapter leaves you with in the margin. If the verses bring any related Scriptures to mind, please write them in the margin.

### 1 THESSALONIANS 5

<sup>1</sup> Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. <sup>2</sup> For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup> While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. <sup>4</sup> But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. <sup>5</sup> For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. <sup>6</sup> So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. <sup>7</sup> For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. <sup>8</sup> But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. <sup>9</sup> For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup> who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. <sup>11</sup> Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

<sup>12</sup> We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, <sup>13</sup> and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. <sup>14</sup> And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. <sup>15</sup> See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. <sup>16</sup> Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup> pray without ceasing, <sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. <sup>19</sup> Do not quench the Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Do not despise prophecies, <sup>21</sup> but test everything; hold fast what is good. <sup>22</sup> Abstain from every form of evil.

<sup>23</sup> Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

<sup>25</sup> Brothers, pray for us.

<sup>26</sup> Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.

<sup>27</sup> I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.

<sup>28</sup> The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

## DAY TWO

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2

1. It appears that Paul begins chapter five by answering a question the Thessalonians had asked him. What, based on verses 1 and 2, do you think they asked him?

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## WEEK SIX

### 1 THESSALONIANS 5

## WEEK SIX

### 1 THESSALONIANS 5

2. How do the following verses describe the day of the Lord?

*Isaiah 2:11-17*

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*Isaiah 13:6-13*

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*Joel 1:15*

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*Joel 2:1-11*

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*Joel 2:28-32*

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*Amos 5:18-20*

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*Malachi 4:1-6*

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*2 Thessalonians 2:1-3*

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*Revelation 6:12-17*

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3. Review the verses above and complete the following sentence: *The day of the Lord ...*

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4. What does Paul mean when he says that “the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night”?

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5. Paul borrowed his “thief in the night” imagery from Jesus. What was Jesus teaching his disciples through his use of this analogy?

*Matthew 24:42-44*

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*Luke 12:35-40*

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**DAY THREE**

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:3-11

6. If the day of the Lord is coming like “a thief in the night”, why does Paul say that it won’t surprise the Christian?

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7. How will this day come upon those who are not Christians?

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8. Paul tells the believer to “keep awake and be sober”. How do you think believers can do this?

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9. Outline Jesus’ warning to his disciples in Matthew 24:42-44. Based on verses 45-51, how do you think the disciples were to do this?

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10. In 1 Thessalonians 5:8, Paul compares faith, love, and hope to pieces of armor. To what pieces does he compare them? Why do you think he uses these specific comparisons?

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## WEEK SIX

### 1 THESSALONIANS 5

11. What hope can the believer draw from verses 9 and 10? How should an understanding of these verses shape your understanding of the day of the Lord?

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12. What were the Thessalonian believers to do with Paul's teaching in these verses? Why did he tell them these things? *1 Thessalonians 5:11*

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#### DAY FOUR

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22

13. These verses contain a number of instructions to the Thessalonians. Which of these instructions is most applicable to your life at this moment?

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14. What can you do to see a change in this area?

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#### DAY FIVE

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:23-28

15. In verses 23 and 24 Paul asks God to do two things for the church. What are they?

1.

2.

16. Why does Paul believe that these two things will happen?

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17. In verse 23, Paul asks God to sanctify the saints. In 1 Thessalonians 4:2-7, the responsibility for a person's sanctification seems to rest on that particular person. How do you reconcile these two different approaches to a person's sanctification? *See, also, Hebrews 10:10 and 10:14*

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18. Why is it important that the Christian be found “blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”? *Matthew 10:22, Matthew 24:13, Colossians 1:21-23, 1 Timothy 6:13-14*

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## WEEK SIX

### 1 THESSALONIANS 5

19. Based on these verses, how would you respond to the person who says, “I accepted Jesus when I was eight (or whatever age). I’m safe. It doesn’t matter how I live now”?

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## DAY SIX

20. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week, the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

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## THE DAY OF THE LORD

Chapter 5 begins with the phrase “Now concerning”. Paul uses this same phrase in 1 Corinthians 7:1, 7:25, and 8:1. There, the phrase is used by Paul as he addresses matters about which the Corinthians had written to Paul.

*Now concerning the matters about which you wrote ... 1 Corinthians 7:1*

The Thessalonians probably sent this question to Paul via Timothy (remember, he had just returned to Paul from the church). The Thessalonians had a question regarding the timing of a particular event.

*Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2*

The believers wanted to know when “the day of the Lord” would come. Paul’s answer is very simple: the day of the Lord “will come like a thief in the night”. He says that the believers were “fully aware” of this, indicating that he had taught them about the day of the Lord and its coming when he was with them. However, they still had questions about this day.

Before we address Paul’s answer, it is worth considering the meaning of the phrase “the day of the Lord”, for it is highly significant. The day of the Lord is referred to in both the Old and New Testaments. Consider the following passages regarding this day.

*The haughty looks of man shall be brought low,  
and the lofty pride of men shall be humbled,  
and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day.*

## WEEK SIX

### 1 THESSALONIANS 5

*For the LORD of hosts has a day  
against all that is proud and lofty,  
against all that is lifted up—and it shall be brought low;  
against all the cedars of Lebanon,  
lofty and lifted up;  
and against all the oaks of Bashan;  
against all the lofty mountains,  
and against all the uplifted hills;  
against every high tower,  
and against every fortified wall;  
against all the ships of Tarshish,  
and against all the beautiful craft.  
And the haughtiness of man shall be humbled,  
and the lofty pride of men shall be brought low,  
and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day. Isaiah 2:11-17*

*Behold, the day of the LORD comes,  
cruel, with wrath and fierce anger,  
to make the land a desolation  
and to destroy its sinners from it.  
For the stars of the heavens and their constellations  
will not give their light;  
the sun will be dark at its rising,  
and the moon will not shed its light.  
I will punish the world for its evil,  
and the wicked for their iniquity;  
I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant,  
and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless.  
I will make people more rare than fine gold,  
and mankind than the gold of Ophir.  
Therefore I will make the heavens tremble,  
and the earth will be shaken out of its place,  
at the wrath of the LORD of hosts  
in the day of his fierce anger. Isaiah 13:9-13*

*Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near,  
and as destruction from the Almighty it comes. Joel 1:15*

*The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and  
awesome day of the LORD comes. Joel 2:31*

*Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD!  
Why would you have the day of the LORD?  
It is darkness, and not light,  
as if a man fled from a lion,  
and a bear met him,  
or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall,  
and a serpent bit him.  
Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light,  
and gloom with no brightness in it? Amos 5:18-20*

*When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake,  
and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars  
of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale.  
The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island  
was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the  
generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves  
in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and*

*rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” Revelation 6:12-17*

The day of the Lord is called “the great and awesome day”, however, this day is not awesome in the positive sense that the word awesome is used today. It is terrible. The day of the Lord is described as “darkness” and a day of “destruction from the Almighty”. This is the day when God is exalted and mankind is humbled. It is the day when he pours out his wrath on mankind.

The day of the Lord was a well known event to the people of Israel. So well known, in fact, that Jesus made statements like “it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town” (Luke 10:12) and people knew that “that day” was referring to “the day of the Lord”.

Paul provides a perfect summary of this day in his words to the Thessalonians. He describes it as a day of “sudden destruction” from which there will be no escape.

*While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. 1 Thessalonians 5:3*

The day of the Lord, then, is a day of judgment. But, and this is extremely important, it is also a day of deliverance for the people of God. The deliverance/destruction duality of this day can be seen in Malachi’s words—the last words recorded in the Old Testament. Notice the contrast between what this day will bring to those who do evil and to those “who fear [God’s] name”.

*“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts.” Malachi 4:1-3*

The day of the Lord is a day of victory and a day of defeat. It is the day of God’s victory over sin and darkness and evil. It is the day God’s people experience his victory. And it is the day when God’s enemies are defeated. In short, it is the “day of God’s action to bring in the kingdom”.<sup>1</sup>

We must consider that the day of the Lord, while it may be spoken of as coming sometime in the future, has, at the same time, *already come in Jesus*.<sup>2</sup> His resurrection was the fulfillment of all that the prophets prophesied. He already has brought deliverance to the righteous. He has brought them, as Malachi 4 prophesies, out from darkness “leaping like calves from the stall”.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter insisted that the Holy Spirit had been poured out because the day of the Lord had come in Jesus’ resurrection.<sup>3</sup> The fact that the day of the Lord has already come in Jesus demands much reflection. It should shape how the Christian lives.

With one voice the [New Testament authors] proclaim the death and resurrection of Jesus as the point at which all the promises of God reach their fulfillment. This is truly the day of the Lord.<sup>4</sup>

[The apostles] ... saw that the day of the Lord covered the past, the present and the future. In the past the day of the Lord was the decisive historic event of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. He embodied in his person the perfection of all the covenant relationships between God and man. in [sic] that sense he was the kingdom of God come FOR US. The day of the Lord came as the wrath of God was poured out upon our substitute when he hung on the cross. The day of the Lord came as the people of God rose from the grave in the person of their substitute and ascended to sit with him at the right hand of God (Romans 6:1-10; Ephesians 2:4-6; Colossians 3:1-3).<sup>5</sup>

1 Graeme Goldsworthy, *The Goldsworthy Trilogy: The Gospel in Revelation* (Colorado Springs, Col.: Paternoster, 2008), 289.

2 This may be seen in Malachi 4:5. This verse predicts that God will send “Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes”. According to Jesus, John the Baptist fulfilled this role. Thus, Jesus’ first coming may be referred to as the day of the Lord.

3 See Acts 2:14-21. Peter’s words here are drawn from Joel 2:28-31.

4 Goldsworthy, *The Goldsworthy Trilogy: The Gospel in Revelation*, 223.

5 Goldsworthy, *The Goldsworthy Trilogy: The Gospel in Revelation*, 224-225.



## WEEK SIX

### 1 THESSALONIANS 5

But the day of the Lord was not just fulfilled in Jesus' resurrection. We must understand that, through the preaching of the gospel, the day of the Lord comes upon those to whom we preach even today.

It is the giving of the Spirit coupled with the ascension of Jesus that structures the fulfillment of the day of the Lord in the New Testament. The Spirit's task is to illuminate the believers with the truth of the gospel so that they can preach it down through the ages. The Spirit makes real to mankind the meaning of the gospel as the means which God uses to establish the kingdom. Since Christ ascended before manifesting the glory of his kingdom, the Holy Spirit comes to enable the church to preach the gospel. It is by this means alone that the kingdom comes in the world, but by the gospel the kingdom *does* come.<sup>6</sup>

Right now, the day of the Lord is known by Christ's followers through faith. One day, however, it will be known by all—not just by faith, but by sight. It will be the actual experience of all people. This—the “final manifestation” of the day of the Lord—is the day to which Paul refers in 1 (and 2) Thessalonians.

To summarize, the day of the Lord, one, *has come* in Jesus, two, *is being revealed* to people right now through the preaching of the gospel, and three, *will be seen and experienced* by all people sometime in the future.

Is this day the same day as the day we considered in 1 Thessalonians 4—the day of the coming of the Lord? It appears that it is. In other words, Jesus' *parousia* and the day of the Lord appear to be one and the same event.

Remember, when Paul wrote this letter there were no chapter breaks. Thus, chapters four and five weren't divided by Paul in his original manuscript. This is how the passage we looked at last week (regarding Jesus' coming) and the passage we are considering this week (regarding the day of the Lord) look when they are combined without chapter and paragraph breaks. Notice, particularly, the connection between Jesus' coming and the day of the Lord.

*For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words. Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.*  
1 Thessalonians 4:15-5:2

We find further confirmation that Jesus' coming and the day of the Lord occur at the same time in 2 Thessalonians 1 and 2.

*This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.* 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10

*Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.* 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2

<sup>6</sup> Goldsworthy, *The Goldsworthy Trilogy: The Gospel in Revelation*, 224.

The day of the Lord and the day of Jesus' coming are one and the same. This day will bring great joy to the saints as they are gathered to Christ and great woe to the unbelieving inhabitants of the earth as wrath is poured out upon them.

The Thessalonians wanted to know when this day would come. However, as we see consistently throughout the New Testament, we cannot know the time of this day.<sup>7</sup> It will come "like a thief in the night". As is evident from the verses below, Paul draws his "thief in the night" metaphor from Jesus' words.

*"Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."* Matthew 24:42-44

*"But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."* Luke 12:39-40

Note that Jesus compares his coming to the coming of a thief. Paul uses this same language to describe the day of the Lord. Again, we see that these events are one and the same.

What, then, should Christians do since the day of the Lord cannot be timed? We shouldn't panic. We shouldn't act like it will never come. Rather, we should stay awake and stay sober.

*But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.* 1 Thessalonians 5:4-8

As we have already seen, Paul is echoing things here that Jesus spoke about his coming. Jesus warned his followers that they must "be ready" (Matthew 24:44) and "Watch" (Matthew 25:13). He told a parable about a servant who, on account of his master's long delay in returning, "begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards" (Matthew 24:49) instead of doing as he has been told. That servant, Jesus said, would be surprised at his master's coming. The master would "cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites" (Matthew 24:51). Paul draws from Jesus' words, rearranging them for his Thessalonian audience.

Clearly, the warning for the Christian is that he or she must be ready for Jesus' coming. We stay ready by obeying our Master's commands. Unlike those in the world who are not expecting the day of the Lord, the Christian must be eagerly anticipating it.

These words from Paul are not meant to frighten or to discourage the saints in Thessalonica. He reassures them that the day of the Lord won't surprise them.

*But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.* 1 Thessalonians 5:8

He tells them that their faith in the finished work of Christ and their love directed toward God and each other is like a breastplate protecting them. He tells them that their hope in Jesus' soon return is like a helmet. They are protected in such a way that they will make it to the end.

We, like these saints, should have every confidence that we will stay awake and alert to the end because, as Paul emphasizes in verse nine, "God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation".

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Matthew 24:36, Mark 13:32-37, and Acts 1:7.

## WEEK SIX

### 1 THESSALONIANS 5

*For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. 1 Thessalonians 5:9-11*

God will pour out his wrath on the day of the Lord. The world will experience the full force of his fury. The Christian, however, has not been destined for God's wrath. Instead, the Christian has been destined for salvation.

Paul's words about the day of the Lord are not meant to frighten the Christian. Rather, Paul has spoken in such a way a way that the saints—both then and now—can encourage one another.

### FINAL INSTRUCTIONS

After his words regarding the day of the Lord (and he'll return to this topic in 2 Thessalonians), Paul turns his attention to several "leftover" instructions. Notice the short, clipped commands here. Paul is clearing wrapping things up (the "Finally" he used in 4:1 would be more fitting here), emptying commands on the Thessalonians in the same way that we might empty out a junk drawer: "Here's a screwdriver ... here's a penny ... here's a flashlight"—"respect your leaders ... warn the lazy ... don't quench the Spirit".

*We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil. 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22*

We won't take any time examining these commands. This doesn't mean, however, that they're unimportant. They're extremely important and must be obeyed. A healthy church will pay close attention to these words.

### THE BLESSING

The final blessing is significant and worth careful attention. Notice, particularly, what Paul wants God to do for the saints and how he concludes this blessing.

*Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it. 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24*

Earlier in the letter, Paul spoke about the sanctification of the saints. In those verses, however, Paul told the saints what *they* need to do in order to be sanctified.

*For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8*

In these verses, Paul asks *God* to sanctify the saints. He asks God to keep them—"spirit and soul and body"—"blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ". He says that God, the one who called them, "is faithful; he will surely do it".

Which is it, then? Who brings about my holiness? Based on 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8, it appears that I do. Based on 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, it appears that God does. Which one is correct? They both are!<sup>8</sup> God's work, however, takes precedence. God does the work in me so that I might live in a holy way. Or, to put it another way, the fact that a Christian is able to be self-controlled is evidence that God is working in that person.

Paul's words in verse 24 should have brought great comfort to the Thessalonians and they should greatly comfort us—God will sanctify us completely! The reason we know that he will do this is not because of our greatness. Rather, we know he will do this work in us because of his faithfulness.

This is very similar to the words Paul wrote to the church in Rome.

*And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. Romans 8:30*

Do you see it? All those whom God has predestined he also has called. And the very same ones whom he has called he has justified. And the very same ones whom he has justified he also has glorified. He is the guarantee that we will make it to the end.

And make no mistake, we must make it to the end. We are to be “blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”. He also said this, remember, in 1 Thessalonians 3.

*... and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.*  
1 Thessalonians 3:12-13

Paul echoed this same truth in his first letter to Timothy.

*I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ ...* 1 Timothy 6:13-14

We must not deceive ourselves. Jesus' coming (the day of the Lord) isn't just a time of judgment for non-believers. It's also a time of judgment for believers. We must be “blameless in holiness” and “unstained and free from reproach”.

I can't live that way, and neither can you. However, take heart, for “He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it”.

<sup>8</sup> See, again, Hebrews 10:10 and 10:14.

# *Week Seven*

## **2 THESSALONIANS 1**

## DAY ONE

Read 2 Thessalonians 1 through twice. The first time through the chapter, simply read the text. Do not write any notes regarding the chapter at this time. The second time through the chapter, circle or underline key words or phrases and write down any questions or thoughts the chapter leaves you with in the margin. If the verses bring any related Scriptures to mind, please write them in the margin.

### 2 THESSALONIANS 1

<sup>1</sup> Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

*To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:*

<sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>3</sup> We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.

<sup>4</sup> Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.

<sup>5</sup> This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— <sup>6</sup> since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, <sup>7</sup> and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels <sup>8</sup> in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. <sup>9</sup> They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, <sup>10</sup> when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. <sup>11</sup> To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, <sup>12</sup> so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

## DAY TWO

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4

1. How does Paul describe the *spiritual* condition of the Thessalonian church in verses 1-4?

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2. Why would Paul say that “We ought always to give thanks to God” regarding these things?

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3. How does Paul describe the *physical* condition of the church at this time?

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## WEEK SEVEN

### 2 THESSALONIANS 1

## WEEK SEVEN

### 2 THESSALONIANS 1

4. How could a church be thriving spiritually when it was suffering physically? Why, specifically, might this be the case?

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5. Why do you think Paul and his companions boasted about the Thessalonian church to other churches? What would this have accomplished?

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6. In verses 5-11, Paul turns his attention (again) to the coming of Jesus. How might this future event apply to the current conditions of the Thessalonians?

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### DAY THREE

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:5-11

7. What will happen to/for the believer “when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven”?

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8. What should a believer do with this information? *See also 1 Thessalonians 4:18*

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9. Why will this happen to/for the believer? *2 Thessalonians 1:10*

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## DAY FOUR

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:5-11

10. What will happen to/for the nonbeliever “when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven”?

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11. Verse 9 refers to “the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might”. Paul is clearly talking about hell here. What do the following verses teach about hell?

*Matthew 8:11-12*

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*Matthew 13:41-42*

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*Matthew 24:48-51*

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*Matthew 25:30*

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*Matthew 25:45-46*

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*Mark 9:43-48*

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*Luke 13:24-28*

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*Revelation 14:9-11*

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*Revelation 20:14-15*

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12. What should a believer do with this information? *See also Acts 10:42*

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## WEEK SEVEN

### 2 THESSALONIANS 1



## WEEK SEVEN

### 2 THESSALONIANS 1

#### DAY FIVE

13. Review Paul's words regarding the coming of Jesus in 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13, 4:13-18, 5:1-11, 5:23-24, and 2 Thessalonians 1:5-12. What, specifically, will happen on this day?

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#### DAY SIX

14. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week, the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

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#### FIRST COMES SUFFERING

This letter covers much of the same ground as 1 Thessalonians. It was written, apparently, shortly after the first letter. It was written because conditions in Thessalonica were steadily growing better ... and worse.

*The better* was that the Christians were growing in faith (toward God) and love (toward one another).

*We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.* 2 Thessalonians 1:3

Paul and his team knew that God was behind the growing faith and love that was evident in the church. That's why they were constantly thanking him for extending grace and mercy to these saints.

Growing faith in God and love for fellow believers are two critical indicators of whether a Christian is healthy. As a believer grows in faith, he or she will naturally love other believers more. A Christian cannot be growing in faith in God and, at the same time, be loving his or her fellow believers less.

*The worse* was that trouble seems to have intensified in Thessalonica. The church's growth in faith and love was happening in the midst of terrible persecution. In fact, the church's growth during this time of suffering was so extraordinary (even among churches where suffering was the norm) that Paul and his team couldn't stop telling other churches about it.

*Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.* 2 Thessalonians 1:4

It is important to understand that God doesn't allow his saints to suffer because he simply wants to see them suffer. Rather, he uses suffering for the benefit of the believer. Suffering—and the believer's perseverance in the midst of it—is evidence (but not the only evidence) that God has judged the believer worthy of his kingdom.

*This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering ...*  
2 Thessalonians 1:5

The same truth—that perseverance in the midst of persecution is a mark of salvation for the saved—may be seen in Paul's letter to the church in Philippi.

*Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. Philippians 1:27-28*

Persecution is a mark of acceptance for the one being persecuted. It is also a road that all of Jesus' followers must travel.

*... through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. Acts 14:22*

*Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted ...*  
2 Timothy 3:12

Suffering is necessary and it is good, because it is the road Jesus traveled and it is a mark that we are on that road. Taken in this way, it is easy to see why churches that suffer intense persecution flourish. They flourish because the saints know, in a very real way, that God has righteously judged them and that they have been counted worthy of the kingdom of God.

## THEN COMES GLORY

But Paul wanted the Thessalonian Christians to know that conditions would not always remain as they were then. They would not always be the sufferers. Suffering, for the believer, is followed by glory.

*... and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. Romans 8:17*

At the same time, Paul wanted the Thessalonian Christians to know that the persecutors would not always be at their throats. Their day was coming.

*... since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10*

These verses show God doing two things in the future: one, he will “repay with affliction those who afflict you”, and two, he will “grant relief to you who are afflicted”.

Paul was very specific about when these two things will happen. They will happen “when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire”. Paul is talking about Jesus' *parousia* (as we have seen, he also refers to this time as the day of the Lord). This is not a new subject for the Thessalonians (or us). Paul wrote about Jesus' coming in 1 Thessalonians 3:13, 4:13-18, 5:1-11, and 5:23-24.

## WEEK SEVEN

### 2 THESSALONIANS 1

Paul has already outlined in 1 Thessalonians the dual nature of the day of the Lord. Here, he says that on this day—the day of his coming, Jesus will be “inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus”. Their punishment will be “eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might”.

Paul draws his thoughts from the Old Testament here.

*Pour out your wrath on the nations that know you not,  
and on the peoples that call not on your name,  
for they have devoured Jacob;  
they have devoured him and consumed him,  
and have laid waste his habitation. Jeremiah 10:25*

*“For behold, the LORD will come in fire,  
and his chariots like the whirlwind,  
to render his anger in fury,  
and his rebuke with flames of fire.  
For by fire will the LORD enter into judgment,  
and by his sword, with all flesh;  
and those slain by the LORD shall be many.” Isaiah 66:15-16<sup>1</sup>*

This punishment will be, as Paul notes in verse nine, “eternal”. Hell isn’t specifically mentioned here, but Paul certainly has hell in mind as he writes these words.

It must be said that the idea of eternal punishment in hell seems, to a growing number of people today, to be a terribly medieval concept—somewhat akin to the Spanish Inquisition. One argument against the idea of eternal conscious punishment in hell is the seeming injustice of the punishment. How can crimes committed during a limited time span on earth warrant everlasting punishment? How can a good God do such terrible evil to people? A few comments related to these objections are in order here.

(1) Jesus speaks of hell with great frequency.<sup>2</sup> In fact, all the other biblical authors combined taught less on the subject than Jesus. He regularly affirms that hell is real and makes no apologies for its existence.

We must come to grips with the fact that Jesus said more about hell than Daniel, Isaiah, Paul, John, Peter put together. Before we dismiss this, we have to realize we are saying to Jesus, the pre-eminent teacher of love and grace in history, “I am less barbaric than you. Jesus—I am more compassionate and wiser than you.” Surely that should give us pause! Indeed, upon reflection, it is because of the doctrine of judgment and hell that Jesus’ proclamations of grace and love are so astounding.<sup>3</sup>

(2) The symbols used to describe hell (i.e., fire and darkness and maggots) need not be taken literally for hell to be real. This should be no comfort for people destined for hell. The symbols in the Bible always point to something greater than themselves (i.e., the Passover lamb in Exodus points to Jesus—he is infinitely greater than the symbol). Symbols are a small picture that helps us see a larger reality.

Hell will be worse than it is described, not better. Hell will be the removal of a person—totally—“from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might” (2 Thessalonians 1:9). This means that a person in hell will experience no love, no grace, no kindness, no goodness, no mercy, and no compassion, for all these things come from God. All the “common graces” (i.e., the grace that God extends to all people) will be absent in hell. People there will have the totally godless environment that they have always desired. And they will hate it.

<sup>1</sup> See also Isaiah 2:10 and 2:19-21.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Matthew 5:21-30, 10:28, 18:8-9, 23:15, 23:33, 25:41-46, and Mark 9:43-48.

<sup>3</sup> Tim Keller, “The Importance of Hell,” n.p. [cited 29 October 2009]. Online: [http://redeemer.com/news\\_and\\_events/articles/the\\_importance\\_of\\_hell.html](http://redeemer.com/news_and_events/articles/the_importance_of_hell.html).

(3) We must recognize that it is not our place to determine the “just” punishment for sin, because these crimes are not, ultimately, committed against us. They are against God. Therefore, who are we to determine the appropriate punishment these sins against a holy God warrant? We don’t think like God. He is altogether different from you and me. Therefore, his judgment of sin and of what sin deserves, I should expect, will be different from how we might judge sin. The only one who could judge the magnitude of a crime against God would be God himself.

(4) A crime’s gravity is based on the importance of the person against whom it is committed. God is inexpressibly holy and good. He is infinitely greater than all other persons, therefore a crime against the unique and holy God is infinitely greater than a crime committed against anyone else. By the same token, it is right to expect that its punishment would also be infinitely greater.

(5) The gospel event (Jesus’ life, death, resurrection) was the greatest and most loving act in all history. God the Father killed God the Son so that people might be able to come to him. Rejection of this gospel is, therefore, an unfathomably terrible crime and is worthy of the greatest punishment.

(6) Many believe that eternal punishment is only for crimes committed during this lifetime. This is based on the assumption that people stop sinning when they go to hell. But why should we think this? Why would we think that people would suddenly quit sinning after they have died? Has their character changed? Have they been born again? Does the Holy Spirit now live in them? If people are eternally sinning why shouldn’t they be eternally punished?

(7) Many scripture passages (i.e., Revelation 20:10) clearly speak of eternal torment. In some of these passages, eternal punishment is compared with eternal life (see, for instance, Matthew 25:46). All Christians believe eternal life will last forever. Why would we have a problem with seeing eternal punishment as also lasting forever?

(8) People will receive what they want. Those who desire to see and know Christ’s glory will receive exactly that. Those who desire to be as far from God as possible will receive that. Tim Keller describes hell as “a prison in which the doors are first locked from the inside by us and therefore are locked from the outside by God (Luke 16:26). Every indication is that those doors continue to stay forever barred from the inside”.<sup>4</sup>

Jesus’ arrival will strike terror in those who oppose him. And that is just the beginning of trouble for these people. However, for those who love Jesus, his coming will be unspeakably wonderful. At that time, when we meet him in the air, Jesus will “be glorified in his saints” and will “be marveled at among all who have believed”.

Something wonderful will happen in and to us when Jesus comes back! Our imperfections will disappear in a moment. His glory—the full weight of who he is—will shine through us.<sup>5</sup> Our jaws will drop at the greatness of Jesus. We will marvel at his glory—the glory that we see in him and displayed in each other.

At that moment, Paul’s words from 1 Corinthians 15 will come to pass.

*What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.*

4 Tim Keller, “The Importance of Hell,” n.p. [cited 29 October 2009]. Online: [http://redeemer.com/news\\_and\\_events/articles/the\\_importance\\_of\\_hell.html](http://redeemer.com/news_and_events/articles/the_importance_of_hell.html).

5 See also Romans 8:17-18.

## WEEK SEVEN

### 2 THESSALONIANS 1

*I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:*

*“Death is swallowed up in victory.” “O death, where is your victory?*

*O death, where is your sting?”*

*The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*

*1 Corinthians 15:42-58<sup>6</sup>*

When is the last time—if ever—you marveled at anything? Make no mistake, if you are a Christian, you will marvel on that day.

The only reason anyone is eligible to see the glorious side of this day is because of faith in Christ Jesus. As Paul says to the church in Thessalonica, “[these things will happen] because our testimony to you was believed” (2 Thessalonians 1:10).

Of course, Jesus has not come yet. We must live with the present in mind even while we look forward toward the future. That is why, even while Paul speaks to the church about the future, he prays for the church in the present.

*To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12*

<sup>6</sup> See also 1 Corinthians 13:10-12.

# *Week Eight*

## **2 THESSALONIANS 2**

## WEEK EIGHT

### 2 THESSALONIANS 2

#### DAY ONE

Read 2 Thessalonians 2 through twice. The first time through the chapter, simply read the text. Do not write any notes regarding the chapter at this time. The second time through the chapter, circle or underline key words or phrases and write down any questions or thoughts the chapter leaves you with in the margin. If the verses bring any related Scriptures to mind, please write them in the margin.

#### 2 THESSALONIANS 2

<sup>1</sup> Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, <sup>2</sup> not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. <sup>3</sup> Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, <sup>4</sup> who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. <sup>5</sup> Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? <sup>6</sup> And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. <sup>7</sup> For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. <sup>8</sup> And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.

<sup>9</sup> The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, <sup>10</sup> and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. <sup>11</sup> Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, <sup>12</sup> in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

<sup>13</sup> But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. <sup>14</sup> To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>15</sup> So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

<sup>16</sup> Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, <sup>17</sup> comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

#### DAY TWO

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

1. Something took place in the church in Thessalonica that prompted Paul to return, once again, to the topic of the coming of Jesus. What was it?

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2. Why would this “something” have alarmed the church? In other words, what would this “something”, if true, have meant for the Thessalonians? Review 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, 5:1-11, and 2 Thessalonians 1:5-12

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## DAY THREE

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

3. According to Paul, what two things must happen before the coming of the day of the Lord?

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2. \_\_\_\_\_

4. What do you think the rebellion is?

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5. How does Paul describe the “man of lawlessness”?

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6. Outline the events Jesus indicates will take place before his (Jesus’) coming? *Matthew 24:3-31*

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7. What similarities do you find between 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 and Matthew 24:3-31? Any differences?

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## DAY FOUR

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

8. Why, according to verse six, hasn’t this “man of lawlessness” already been revealed?

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## WEEK EIGHT

### 2 THESSALONIANS 2



## WEEK EIGHT

### 2 THESSALONIANS 2

9. How will the “man of lawlessness” be defeated?

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10. What does this tell you about the Lord? What does this tell you about the “man of lawlessness”?

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11. Read verses 11 and 12 carefully. Who is behind the coming of the “man of lawlessness”?

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12. Why would he do this?

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13. What does this tell you about Satan?

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14. What does this tell you about God?

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15. What comfort, if any, can the Christian find in this fact?

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### DAY FIVE

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

16. Paul’s words in these verses are a contrast to verses one through 12. Why, based on these verses, can the believer take great hope in the days ahead?

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17. Compare the work God does for the saved (verses 13-17) with the work he does for the lost (verses 1-12).

God's work for the saved	God's work for the lost

## WEEK EIGHT

### 2 THESSALONIANS 2

#### DAY SIX

18. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week, the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

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#### A SCARE CONCERNING THE DAY OF THE LORD

Paul is still talking about the coming of Jesus (also known as the day of the Lord). He is not doing this because he wants to write a treatise on this specific topic. Rather, he is focusing so heavily on this topic because of something that had happened in the church in Thessalonica.

*Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2*

It appears that someone—either personally or through a (false) word of prophecy or through a letter supposedly written by Paul or through some combination of these things—had told the church that the day of the Lord had already come.

Those who have read 1 Thessalonians should know why this news would have alarmed the church. They were alarmed, because, if it was true that the day of the Lord had already come, it was also true that they had not experienced any of the glorious things that Paul had taught them would happen on the day of the Lord. Christ had not come down “with a cry of command” and “with the voice of an archangel” and “with the sound of the trumpet of God”. They had not been “caught up together” with the saints who had died before them. And, worst of all, they had not met Jesus “in the air”—which was to mark the beginning of the time when they would “always be with the Lord”. In other words, if the day of the Lord had already come, these saints could no longer believe that the glorious events that were to take place on the day of the Lord would happen to them.

What did they believe? It's not entirely certain. Perhaps someone was teaching them that the spiritual rebirth they had experienced was the only resurrection they would ever experience. If so, this news would have been more than just alarming. It would have been downright depressing. True, their sins had been forgiven, but they would never live in a sinless body. They would be stuck with the corruptible bodies they currently had. They would never fellowship with the Lord face-to-face. It seems this would have opened up, once again, the question about what happens to the dead saints. Beyond this, the saints in Thessalonica were experiencing terrible persecution. What

## WEEK EIGHT

### 2 THESSALONIANS 2

had happened to the relief they had been promised—relief they were to physically experience on the day of the Lord?

The false teaching in Thessalonica seems vaguely similar to the teaching Paul refuted in his first letter to the church in Corinth. There, the saints were being taught (it's not clear by whom) that "there is no resurrection of the dead" (1 Corinthians 15:12). Paul, in a letter written perhaps four years after his letters to the Thessalonians, vigorously refutes that false teaching by connecting Jesus' physical resurrection with the Christian's physical resurrection and Jesus' physical resurrection with the Christian's freedom from sin. But Paul does not use these same arguments with the church in Thessalonica. This seems to indicate that there were noteworthy differences between the false teaching in Corinth and the false teaching in Thessalonica. It is not entirely clear what all those differences might have been.

But while we don't have all the details about the false teaching, we do have the true teaching (and if you're going to have just one side of things, it's far better to have the true teaching than just the false!). In answer to the false teaching in Thessalonica (the belief that the day of the Lord had already come), Paul quickly details why this false teaching cannot be true. He proves this by telling the church about two events that must take place before the day of the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

*Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction ... 2 Thessalonians 2:3*

The two things that must happen before the day of the Lord are: one, "the rebellion" will come and two, a man—"the man of lawlessness"—will be revealed.

This coming rebellion is not just any rebellion. It is a rebellion of such a particularly notorious nature that Paul describes it as "the rebellion". And the man to be revealed is not just any man. He, too, is of a particularly notorious nature. He is so wicked that he is called "the man of lawlessness".

Paul doesn't indicate from where he received this information. However, it appears that Paul is drawing this information from the book of Daniel and from Jesus' words recorded in Matthew 24 (which are also connected to the book of Daniel).

In regard to the coming rebellion, Jesus said that a time is coming when "many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold" (Matthew 24:10-12). Notice that Jesus speaks of people *falling away* and *being led astray*. This indicates that these people will be turning away from the truth they had once professed.

This rebellion, based on Jesus' words, appears to be a rebellion against God and God's people by those who were (at least in name) God's people. It will involve people who have claimed to be Christians turning away from the truth of the gospel and actively working to destroy those who still hold to the truth. This falling away will be fueled by false prophets who, by their false teaching, will "lead many astray".

Of course, people have always fallen away from the faith they professed. This is not uncommon. What is uncommon about this falling away is its size. Notice Jesus' emphasis on the word "many": "many will fall away" and false prophets will "lead many astray". This will be a falling away from the truth in mass.<sup>2</sup>

This should not be taken to mean that true Christians will depart from the faith, for as Romans 8:30 makes clear, "those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified". In other words, God gets all those whom he has predestined to salvation to the ultimate place of salvation (glorification). Jesus himself, in the

1 This is the perfect opportunity to bring up an important principle of interpretation. We must remember that what was future to Paul is not necessarily future to Christians today. A future event to him may well be a past event to those reading the Bible today. However, based on Paul's words to the church in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5 and 2 Thessalonians 1 it is best to see the events to which he is referring here as yet to be fulfilled.

2 See also 1 Timothy 4:1-3. In this passage Paul refers to "later times" when "some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons". It is clear that this departure was already taking place at the time Paul wrote his letter. However, he spoke of an intensification of this departure from the faith in the future.

Matthew 24 passage, indicates that it is not possible for the elect to be led astray.

*For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Matthew 24:24*

Based on these verses and others, we must conclude, then, that those who are led astray in this mass apostasy were never true followers of God. But they were, at least in name, followers to some extent. And they will, in great numbers, depart from the faith they once claimed to hold.

Jesus warns those in the community of faith to be ready for the apostasy and his return, acknowledging that some will not be vigilant and will be judged (Matt. 24:40 - 25:46; Luke 17:28-37). This points to the likelihood that both those outside the church and many, if not most, within the church will be unbelieving. Revelation 11:7-13 and 20:7-10 also prophesy a great, universal deception at the end, which likely means both an intensification of unbelief among already hardened people outside the church and especially ‘apostasy’ within the church.<sup>3</sup>

This rebellion is event number one that must take place before the coming of the day of the Lord.

Connected with this massive rebellion by professed Christians will be the unveiling of “the man of lawlessness”—the second event that must take place before the coming of the day of the Lord. While there have been many men of lawlessness from the beginning of time, this man will be preeminent in his lawlessness.

This person, also called “the son of destruction” here and the “antichrist” in 1 John 2:18, “opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship”. Paul indicates that this person will “[take] his seat in the temple of God”. Jesus, in a similar statement, indicates that this person’s image—“the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel” (Matthew 24:15)—will be seen “standing in the holy place” (Matthew 24:15). The phrase “holy place” is also a clear reference to the temple. Thus, both Paul and Jesus speak of this man somehow establishing himself in a very public way in the temple. He does not do this so that he might worship the true God. Rather, Paul says that he will “take his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God”! Unfortunately, many will believe him.

To what does the temple refer? Many believe that the “temple of God” refers to the temple in Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup> Of course, the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70. This would mean, if this interpretation is correct, that a physical temple would need to be rebuilt in Jerusalem before this prophecy could be fulfilled.

There are good reasons, however, to believe that Paul is not referring to a physical temple in Jerusalem here. Some of these reasons are as follows:

1. Jesus proclaimed that *he* is the temple.

The word “temple” refers to the dwelling place of God. His dwelling place had been the physical temple in Jerusalem. Jesus brought a shift in the meaning of this word. He indicated that he was the temple (Christians—because they are “in him”—are also referred to as the temple).

In Matthew 26:61 Jesus is quoted as saying, ‘I am able to destroy *the temple of God* and to rebuild it in three days.’ This use is significant because it provides a transitional perspective between the Old Testament prophecies of a future, *eschatological* temple and the way Jesus began to view those prophecies as beginning to be fulfilled. The physical temple is mentioned in order to indicate a redemptive-historical shift to the end-time temple. Matthew sees the material temple being destroyed and rebuilt in Jesus’ resurrection body.<sup>5</sup>

The tearing of the curtain in the temple at the time of Jesus’ death indicated that the time of the physical temple’s function had come to an end. In a clear way, God was showing that the temple in Jerusalem would no longer serve as God’s dwelling place and the place where people came to encounter God.

## WEEK EIGHT

### 2 THESSALONIANS 2

3 G.K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (NSBT 17; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004), 280-281.

4 Some believe Paul is referring here to a Roman emperor who destroyed the temple in Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Thus, if this is correct, Paul is referring to an event that was to take place around 20 years in the future to him (he wrote this letter in about A.D. 51), but is past for us. However, Paul indicates that Jesus will destroy the man of sin (antichrist) *at the time of his coming* (2 Thessalonians 2:8). Jesus has not come back yet. Thus, it is difficult to see how this could have been fulfilled in A.D. 70.

5 Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, 275.

## WEEK EIGHT

### 2 THESSALONIANS 2

*And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.*  
Matthew 27:51

We must remember that Paul is writing to Christians in first century Thessalonica. The word “temple” means something very different to Christians living in the New Covenant era than it meant to Israelites living before the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

2. Paul consistently uses the word “temple” to refer to the church.

*Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.* 1 Corinthians 3:16-17

*Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.* 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

*What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”* 2 Corinthians 6:16<sup>6</sup>

*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.* Ephesians 2:19-21

The only two instances when Paul speaks of the temple without reference to the church are, one, when he refers to the temple of an idol in 1 Corinthians 8:10, and, two, when he argues that gospel workers deserve compensation in the same way that “those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple” (1 Corinthians 9:13).

At the very least, then, it seems that it would be uncharacteristic for Paul to refer to the physical temple in Jerusalem as the “temple of God”.

3. The phrase “the temple of God” is not an appropriate name for a temple in Jerusalem.

If a new temple in Jerusalem is built, it will not be, in any sense of the word, the “temple of God” (the name Paul uses in verse four), even if it is dedicated to him. A rebuilt temple would be a blasphemous alternative to the finished work of Christ. Thus, one wonders how Paul could use this phrase if he was referring to a new temple to be built in Jerusalem.

It could be argued, perhaps, that Paul is using the title “the temple of God” because this became, through common usage, something of a proper name for the temple in Jerusalem. Upon examination, however, this potential argument collapses, for the New Testament does not consistently use this phrase to refer to the temple in Jerusalem and this exact phrase is used to describe the church.

The same phrase, *God’s temple*, is found nine other times in the New Testament outside of 2 Thessalonians, and it almost always refers either to Christ or the church. Not once in Paul (five other times outside 2 Thess) does it refer to a literal temple in Israel of the past or the future.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> This is a highly significant passage because Paul quotes from Leviticus 26:12—an Old Testament passage!—to prove that Christian believers are the temple of God.

<sup>7</sup> G.K. Beale, *1-2 Thessalonians* (The IVP New Testament Commentary Series; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2003), 207-208.

4. The idea that Paul is referring to the temple in Jerusalem here contradicts statements Paul made concerning Israel in 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16.

... as we have seen in the first Thessalonian epistle (2:16), Paul believed that national Israel as the chosen people of God had come to its end. Presumably, the end of Israel's temple also would have been included in Paul's understanding, since Christ had predicted its destruction (e.g., Luke 21:6, 32). This means that Paul could not have viewed Israel's temple as 'the [true] temple of God' *even before* its actual destruction in AD 70 ...<sup>8</sup>

For these reasons, it seems best to understand the phrase "the temple of God" as a description of the church. The view that the "temple" is the church would, if correct, indicate that the man of lawlessness gains a position of prominence in the worldwide church. He "takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God".

This reference to the antichrist sitting should not be taken to mean that he will physically sit down in the church.

... to "sit" in the temple of God is likely not a reference to the antichrist's literal positioning of himself in the center of a physical temple but to a figurative sitting, a ruling (see, e.g., Mt 23:2; 26:64; Acts 2:30-36; Heb 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; Rev 3:21). This is supported further by the observation that Revelation uses the phrase "*sit on a throne*" approximately fifteen times for God, Jesus or saints being in a position of authority ....<sup>9</sup>

The antichrist will, in a very public way, take a position of authority in the church and proclaim that he is God.

... verses 3-4 mean that the latter-day assailant will come into the midst of the church, 'the temple of God', and cause it to become predominantly apostate and unbelieving. He will then try to take control of the church by spreading deception in it.<sup>10</sup>

Obviously, people throughout history have proclaimed that they are God. Usually only a few accept this claim. This time, however, masses of people will believe this lie to be the truth.

It is important to know that this man of lawlessness—the antichrist—will not appear at the time of his own choosing. Paul teaches that he is currently being restrained "so that he may be revealed in his time".

*Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed ...*  
2 Thessalonians 2:5-8a

Something or someone (Paul refers to the restrainer as a "what" and as a "he" here) is restraining the "mystery of lawlessness". This restrainer will, at some point, be taken "out of the way". At that time, "the lawless one will be revealed".

Who is this restrainer? There have been many opinions regarding his identity. Two of the most common suggestions are outlined below.

First, some have suggested that the Holy Spirit is this restrainer. Thus, those who hold to this view propose that when the church is removed from the earth to meet the Lord in the air, the restraining power that keeps the antichrist from being revealed (the Holy Spirit) will also be removed. This view, while popular, is not without its difficulties. One difficulty with this view is that both 1 and 2 Thessalonians clearly indicate that the church will remain on earth *until the day of the Lord*. Since the antichrist will be revealed *before the day of the Lord* it is clear that the church (and the Holy Spirit who indwells the church) will not be taken out of the way before he is revealed.

8 Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, 278-279.

9 Beale, 1-2 Thessalonians, 210.

10 Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, 283.

## WEEK EIGHT

### 2 THESSALONIANS 2

Second, others have suggested that the state (particularly Rome) is the restrainer. Tertullian, for instance, said, “What obstacle is there but the Roman state ...?”<sup>11</sup> This view seems to have some merit. For instance, Paul indicates that “the governing authorities ... have been instituted by God” (Romans 13:1). He goes on to say that these authorities are God’s servants, sent to punish wrongdoing. Could it be that, at this time period, there will be a complete breakdown in governmental authority and this breakdown will lead to a vacuum that is filled by the antichrist?

A far less common view is that the angel Michael is the restrainer. There is good biblical evidence that would support this suggestion. The book of Revelation portrays Michael as the angel who leads other angels in battle against Satan.

*Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back ... Revelation 12:7*

The same truth may be seen in the book of Daniel. Michael is portrayed as contending with demonic forces.

*“The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia ....” Daniel 10:13*

*Then he said, “Do you know why I have come to you? But now I will return to fight against the prince of Persia; and when I go out, behold, the prince of Greece will come. But I will tell you what is inscribed in the book of truth: there is none who contends by my side against these except Michael, your prince.” Daniel 10:20-21*

In Daniel 12, a time is referred to when Michael “shall arise”. Immediately after he arises great trouble breaks out.

*“At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book.” Daniel 12:1*

The idea that Michael will “arise” could be seen to mean that he will “arise” to defend his people. It also could mean, and the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) seems to lean in this direction, that Michael will, in effect, “pass away”. In other words, he will vacate his post. If this is correct, he will not, at this time, arise and defend God’s people. Instead he will arise from his post and let the coming events transpire.

It is significant to note that when Michael does this, Daniel’s people—“everyone whose name shall be found written in the book” (i.e., Christians)—will face the greatest trouble they have ever faced. Michael’s arising is followed by great distress. He purposely (if this view is correct) doesn’t fight against it. Deliverance from this trouble, according to this view, will not come from Michael. Deliverance for God’s people will be brought about by the day of the Lord—the event which seems to be described in the very next verse.

*“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” Daniel 12:2*

Another fact that might favor the “restrainer as Michael” view is that Paul has been referring to the book of Daniel throughout 2 Thessalonians 2. It would be quite natural for Paul to use Daniel as the source for the restrainer as well.

<sup>11</sup> Stott, *The Gospel and the End of Time: The Message of 1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 170.



What further favors the angelic identification of the “restrainer” is the fact that Paul has already alluded to Daniel 11:31, 36 in 2:4 and the reference to “mystery” in 2:7 also ultimately derives from Daniel 2, which is the only place in all of the Old Testament where “mystery” occurs with an eschatological meaning ...<sup>12</sup>

Thus, while it is difficult to be dogmatic about the identity of the restrainer, it seems that Michael is a definite possibility.

When the restrainer, whomever or whatever he might be, is removed, the lawless one will be revealed. It is significant to note that as soon as Paul describes his arrival he also describes his destruction.

*... whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. 2 Thessalonians 2:8*

This should bring great comfort to the saints! The antichrist is destroyed almost as quickly as he is unveiled. We must understand that the antichrist is not a counterpart to the real Christ. He is not, in any way, equal to him. Christ kills him “with the breath of his mouth”. His glory—that is, the splendor of Christ’s person—completely overwhelms him.

But now that Paul has talked about the antichrist’s demise (and has, thus, set his readers’ minds at ease), he backtracks a bit and talks again about his coming.

*The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception ... 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10a*

This person will, at least to the world, seem very “Christ-like.” He will, with Satan’s help, perform miracles that clearly demonstrate his “deity”. He will be, if you will, the antichrist of antichrists.

Why would God allow such wickedness? The surprising answer is found in verses ten through 12. The coming of the lawless one is ...

*... for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12*

God allows this wicked man to come because people refuse to love the truth (i.e., Jesus and the gospel message). In fact, *allows* is too weak of a verb. Based on this verse, God is driving—not just allowing—the events here. Notice the shocking statement in verse 11: “God sends them a strong delusion”—the antichrist—“so that they may believe what is false”.

Why would God do this? Why would he send them the antichrist?<sup>13</sup> He does this “in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness”. He does this, as strange as it may sound, to increase the wickedness of the world.

How often do Christians, when talking about the antichrist and the days to come, reflect on the reason behind his coming? It should be a great comfort to know that God is behind the antichrist’s coming, and that he has a reason why he must appear. Jesus is ruling, even right now. There will never be a moment Satan has the upper-hand—even when the antichrist is “takes his seat in the temple of God” and reeks havoc in the church.

There can be a tendency to look at the dark days ahead—whenever they might be—and to want to run for cover. But the believer must not do that. We have a job to do: “this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14).

<sup>12</sup> Beale, 1-2 Thessalonians, 217.

<sup>13</sup> We must understand that God can commission evil without sinning. For instance, Joseph’s brothers committed a great sin in selling him to Egypt. However, scripture indicates that God, not Joseph’s brothers, was ultimately responsible for this action. The Jews and Romans committed great sins in crucifying Jesus. However, scripture is clear that God orchestrated Jesus’ death.



## WEEK EIGHT

### 2 THESSALONIANS 2

Paul isn't writing this to frighten the Thessalonians (and these words aren't meant to frighten us, either). He is writing it to comfort them.

*But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14*

While God acts so that the world will be deceived and condemned (he does this by sending the antichrist), he also acts so that his people will be saved (he does this by choosing them to be saved). This salvation is worked out in the believers as the Holy Spirit sanctifies them (i.e., makes them progressively holier in their actions) and as they trust in him. God hadn't called the Thessalonians for condemnation but that they might "obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ".

This, the calling of God and the promise that his elect will "obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ", is good reason to persevere in the most difficult of times.

*So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.*

*Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word. 2 Thessalonians 2:15-17*

# ***Week Nine***

## **2 THESSALONIANS 3**

## WEEK NINE

### 2 THESSALONIANS 3

#### DAY ONE

Read 2 Thessalonians 3 through twice. The first time through the chapter, simply read the text. Do not write any notes regarding the chapter at this time. The second time through the chapter, circle or underline key words or phrases and write down any questions or thoughts the chapter leaves you with in the margin. If the verses bring any related Scriptures to mind, please write them in the margin.

#### 2 THESSALONIANS 3

*<sup>1</sup> Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, <sup>2</sup> and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith. <sup>3</sup> But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one. <sup>4</sup> And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command. <sup>5</sup> May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.*

*<sup>6</sup> Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. <sup>7</sup> For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, <sup>8</sup> nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. <sup>9</sup> It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. <sup>10</sup> For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. <sup>11</sup> For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. <sup>12</sup> Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.*

*<sup>13</sup> As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good. <sup>14</sup> If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. <sup>15</sup> Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.*

*<sup>16</sup> Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all.*

*<sup>17</sup> I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the sign of genuineness in every letter of mine; it is the way I write. <sup>18</sup> The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.*

#### DAY TWO

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

1. In regard to the preaching of “the word of the Lord”, Paul asks for prayer concerning two things. What are they? *1 Thessalonians 3:1*

1.

2.

2. What do these requests tell you about the work of the gospel?

3. If God desires that these things happen, why do we need to pray about them?

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4. In regard to himself and to his co-workers, Paul asks for prayer concerning one thing. What is it?

1 Thessalonians 3:2

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5. The last sentence in verse two and the first sentence in verse three are tied together. What do you think these sentences, taken together, meant to Paul? What do they mean to you?

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### DAY THREE

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12

6. According to these verses, there seems to have been a major problem in the church in Thessalonica. What was it?

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7. Three different commands are given in verses 6 through 12 related to this problem. What are these commands, and to whom are they directed?

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2.

3.

8. Do you deal with issues like this in a similar way in your church? Why or why not?

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## WEEK NINE

### 2 THESSALONIANS 3

## WEEK NINE

### 2 THESSALONIANS 3

9. What do you think happens when churches ignore these commands?

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10. What do you think happens when churches keep these commands?

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11. Why did Paul and his companions work like they did in Thessalonica? What was their work designed to accomplish?

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12. What does this tell you about the work of the gospel?

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#### DAY FOUR

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:13-15

13. Verses 13 through 15 describe another problem sometimes seen within the church. What is that problem?

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14. How is the church to deal with this problem?

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15. What is this supposed to accomplish?

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16. Do you deal with issues like this in a similar way in your church? Why or why not?

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17. What do you think happens in the church when problems are not dealt with in this manner?

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**DAY FIVE**

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:16-18

18. Why does Paul make the comment here about writing the greeting with his “own hand”?

See 2 Thessalonians 2:2

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19. What does this tell you about the work of the gospel?

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20. Imagine you are a believer in the first century Thessalonian church. What do you think happened after this letter was read to the church?

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21. What should happen in churches today after this letter is read to the church?

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## WEEK NINE

### 2 THESSALONIANS 3

#### DAY SIX

22. Read the study notes and then complete the following sentence. This week, the Holy Spirit has taught me ...

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#### FINALLY ...

We are back to another “Finally” passage. And this time, it looks like Paul means it. We won’t find any antichrists or worldwide rebellions in this chapter. We’re back to normal, everyday life here—the place where most of us spend our time.

Paul begins the conclusion by asking the church to pray for himself and for his fellow workers (Silas and Timothy). He asks the church to pray regarding two specific things. His first prayer request relates to the progress of the gospel.

*Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you ... 2 Thessalonians 3:1*

This first request tells us something about Paul’s understanding of how the gospel is advanced. He believed that its advance was directly related to the prayers of the believers.

At first glance, the advance of the gospel seems to be a strange thing about which to pray. After all, if God wants the gospel to advance, why should we have to ask him to “speed ahead” the word of the Lord and why should we have to ask that it may “be honored”? For that matter, why did Jesus say that his followers should “pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2)? The simple answer is that God has decreed that these things will happen as his people pray about them. If God’s people will not pray, these things will not happen.

Paul’s second request relates to himself and to his fellow workers.

*... and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith. 2 Thessalonians 3:2*

Persecution, while it may serve to advance the gospel at times, is never welcomed by anyone. Paul hadn’t been able to return to Thessalonica because Satan had hindered him (see 1 Thessalonians 2:18) undoubtedly through “wicked and evil men”. How did Paul see himself being delivered from these men (and thus, Satan’s hindrance)? Through the prayers of the saints.

Resist the temptation to read these things without applying them to yourself. You need to pray. It is not a fruitless exercise. It is how God’s work is accomplished on earth. He is letting us participate in the moving of his mighty hand!

I love the transition between verses two and three. Right after Paul says “not all have faith”, he adds, “But the Lord is faithful”. Even though *faithless* (i.e., wicked and evil) men roam the earth, Jesus is *faithful*. He is faithful to himself and he is faithful to his people. We need to remember this. True, there are faithless men and women roaming the earth. True, one day *the faithless man* will roam the earth. True, Satan himself is roaming the earth. But even truer is the fact that Jesus is faithful.

*But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.*  
2 Thessalonians 3:3

## WEEK NINE

### 2 THESSALONIANS 3

Because of the Lord's faithfulness, Paul was convinced that the Thessalonians would be established by Jesus and protected from Satan. He was convinced that the Lord would move their hearts to God's love (a love which would cause them to love God more) and to Christ's steadfastness (which would allow them to persevere in any situation).

*And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command. May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.* 2 Thessalonians 3:4-5

### INSTRUCTIONS REGARDING THE LAZY

Remember Paul's instructions regarding how a Christian ought to work in 1 Thessalonians?

*... aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.* 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

Apparently, this instruction needed to be repeated. There was, based on the following verses, a real problem of laziness in the church in Thessalonica.

*Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.* 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12

There are three commands here: the first command is directed to the non-lazy in the church (verse six), the second command is a general command to all the church (verse ten), and the third command is directed to the lazy in the church (verse 12).

First, Paul commands the non-lazy to "keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us". The church knew the standard for Christians in regard to work because the standard had been demonstrated to them by Paul, Silas, and Timothy. The standard was (and is), quite simply, that Christians are to work hard and to make sure that they are not a burden to anyone else.

Again, it is worth noting that Paul and his team deliberately worked in such a way as to set an example for the church. They didn't have to do this. They had a right, as Paul notes in verse nine, to have their needs met by the church, but they didn't use that right so that they might give the church "an example to imitate". Those who preach the gospel today should take note of this. It's not enough to simply *tell* people what they need to do. We also need to *show* them what to do. This takes deliberate planning on the part of those preaching the gospel.

The second command is a general command that had been given to the church when Paul and his companions first preached the gospel to them: "If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat". What a simple solution! This is not a cold-hearted rule, and it is not unspiritual. It is calculated. If we help those who won't work, they have no need to change. However, if we refuse to help those who won't work, they will need to change—hunger will drive them to it.



## WEEK NINE

### 2 THESSALONIANS 3

This command should be followed by all within the church. It is not good or godly simply to meet everyone's need all of the time. Sometimes, the most godly thing to do is to say, "No". Deacons, especially, should take note of this command. As they strive to provide for those within the church with real needs (i.e., the sick, the elderly, single parents, those looking for work, etc.), this gives them real help in determining when they should and should not provide for a person's needs.

The third command is directed to the lazy. Paul tells them "to do their work quietly and to earn their own living". Note that this command is given "in the Lord Jesus Christ". Thus, the reason the lazy brothers and sisters are to obey is because of the person of Jesus and their relationship to him because of the gospel. He is to be their motivation to work. He is to be my motivation to work.

Laziness is shameful. It must not be tolerated within the church. The solution, based on these verses, is easy. Are we, however, willing to do it?

### INSTRUCTIONS REGARDING THE DISOBEDIENT

Laziness, of course, is not the only problem within a church. Sometimes, people just don't want to do what is right. The solution for those people, as may be seen below, is as simple as the solution for the lazy.

*As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good. If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.*

2 Thessalonians 3:13-15

Christians must not "grow weary in doing good". We are to do this, Paul has emphasized, until the *parousia*. What should we do about those Christians who refuse to obey the Lord? We are to "take note of that person", we are to "warn him as a brother", and, if no change in behavior has taken place, we are to "have nothing to do with him". If the original command is not enough to move the person to obey, and our warnings do not bring about a change, then isolation and shame just might bring the person to repentance.

As with the command for the lazy ("If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat"), the commands here should be, in theory, simple to follow. However, I wonder how often these commands are actually followed. We must understand that when fellow believers will not obey the Lord, we are responsible to do *something*. We should do the things outlined here because these dear, disobedient people are our brothers and sisters and we love them and because we love the church. As with prayer, which is God's appointed means to accomplish much that he does on earth, our disciplinary actions are one way God brings believers to repentance. We must be willing to do these things.

### FINAL WORDS

Paul has completed his letter. He blesses the church with the Lord's peace and with his presence.

*Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all.* 2 Thessalonians 3:16

This letter had been, as was customary in that day, dictated by Paul to a secretary. At this point, however, Paul picks up a pen to "sign" the letter.

*I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the sign of genuineness in every letter of mine; it is the way I write.* 2 Thessalonians 3:17

This hand-written greeting, in Paul's distinctive handwriting, was proof that this letter was genuine. The church needed confidence that Paul himself had sent this letter. They had, remember, believed a false prophecy which had, perhaps, come to them in "a letter seeming to be from us" (2 Thessalonians 2:2). Paul wanted to protect the church from being deceived in such a way again.

His words are also protection against us being deceived. Many antichrists, after all, have gone into the world. Deception will increase even more in the days ahead. We know that "not all have faith" (2 Thessalonians 3:2). But we also know that "the Lord is faithful" (2 Thessalonians 3:3). And he will bring us safely to Jesus at his coming.

Until that day ...

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. 2 Thessalonians 3:18*

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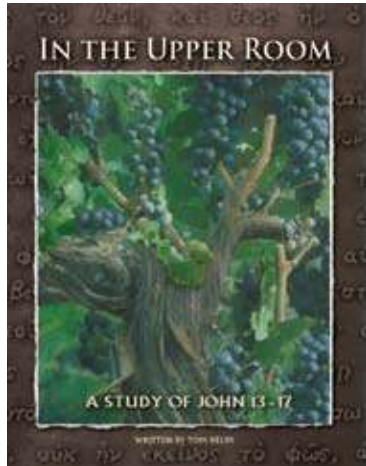
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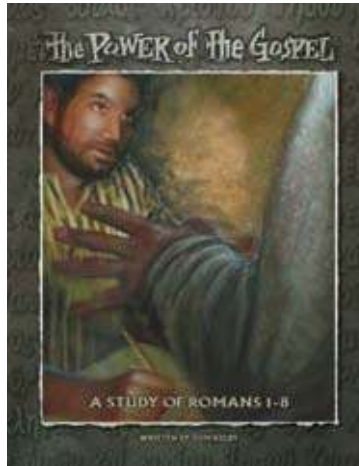
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# Additional Bible Study Resources

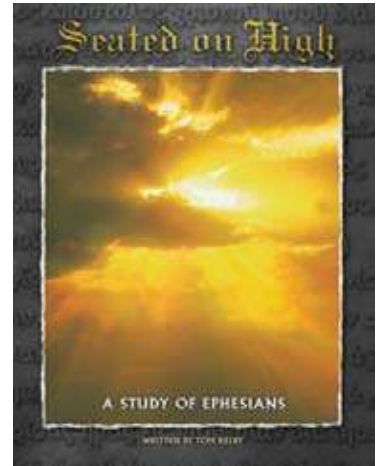
from [handstotheplow.org](http://handstotheplow.org)



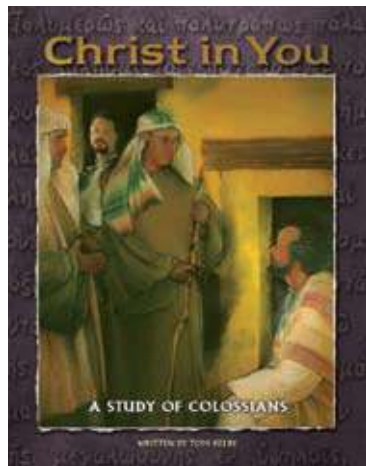
A study of John



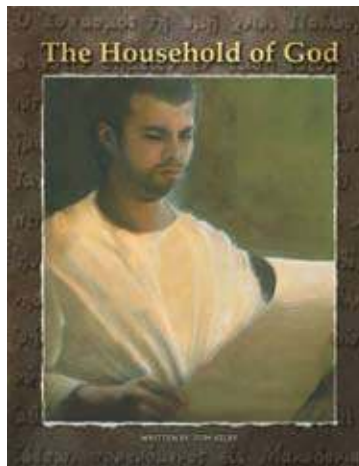
A study of Romans



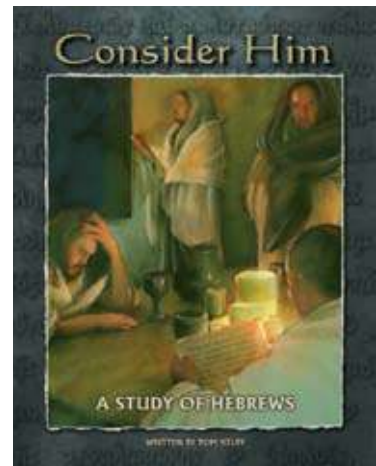
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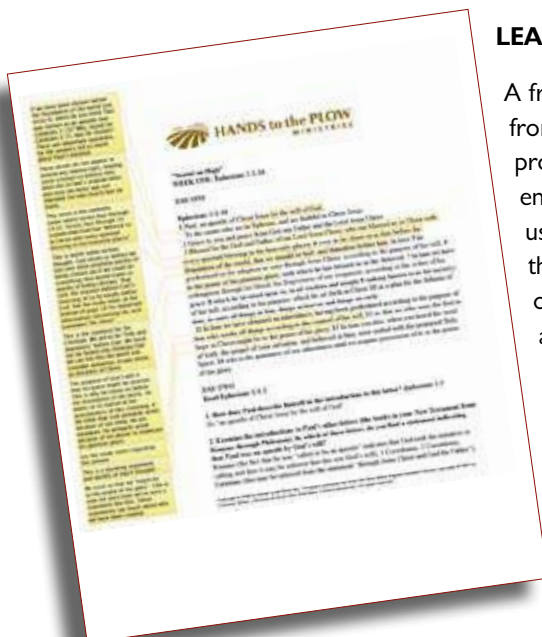
A study of Colossians



A study of 1 Timothy



A study of Hebrews



## LEADER'S GUIDE

A free leader's guide for this study may be downloaded from [handstotheplow.org](http://handstotheplow.org). This leader's guide is designed to provide additional help for those leading the study. We would encourage those who are not leading a study to refrain from using the leader's guide and to wrestle through the text and the questions on their own. Other studies may be ordered or downloaded from the website as well. Leader's guides are also available for these studies. The website also includes audio files of Tom Kelby's sermons (including a series on 1 and 2 Thessalonians which may prove helpful as you study this book) and a blog written by Tom.

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